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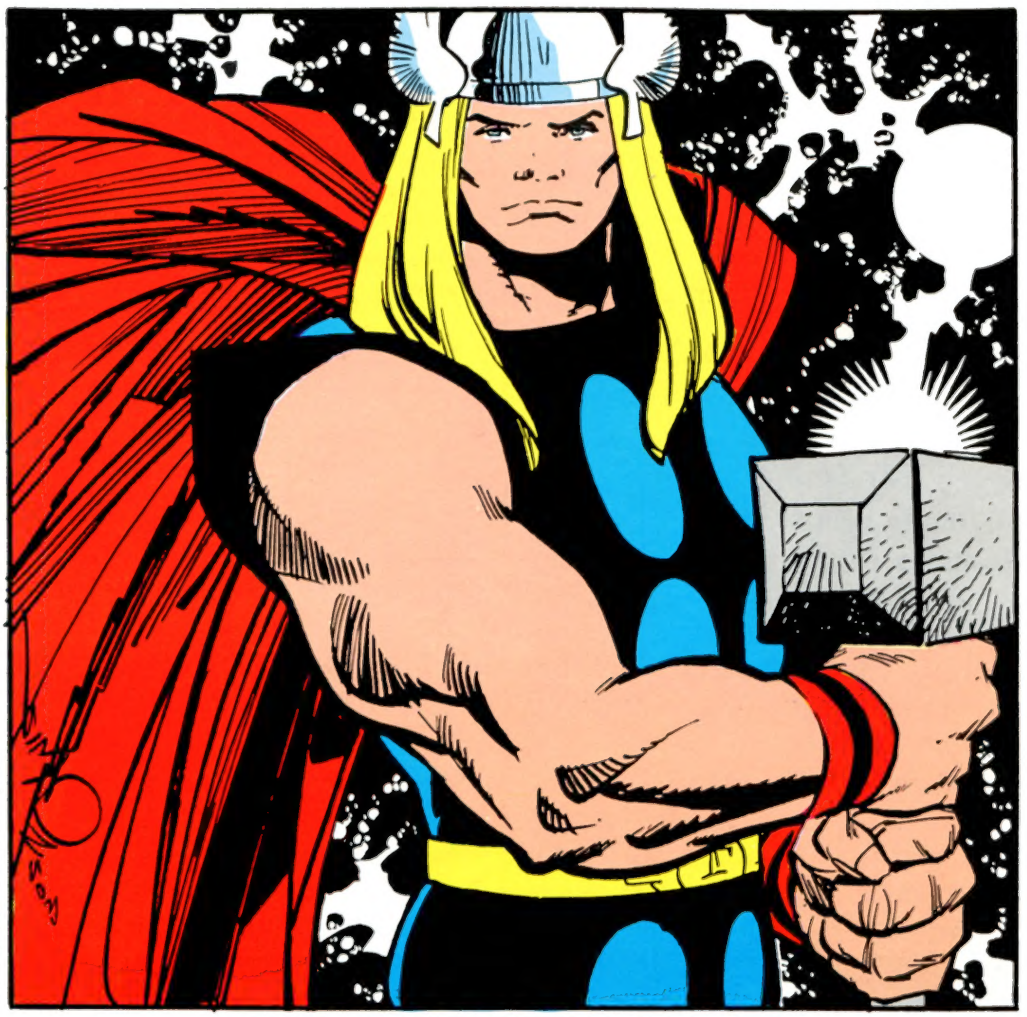

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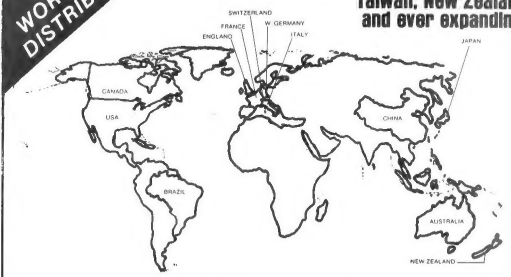

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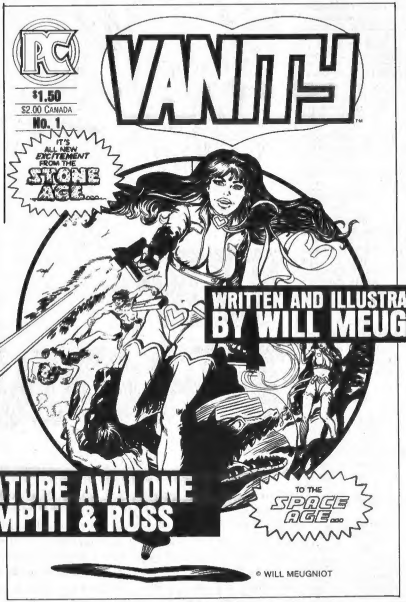

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with compassion

UP FRONT

We're celebrating a very successful year with this extra-special anniversary issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. It's our biggest and best yet — and we want to thank each and every one of you: Advertisers, distributors, retailers, fans and fellow professionals alike. Your continual enthusiasm and support make it all worth while.

In our first year, we picked the winners. Both DC's RONIN and OMEGA MEN were covered here *first* . . . and best. Who knew that AMERICAN FLAGG was going right to the top? *We did.* Starlin's DREADSTAR — another success story. JLA/AVENGERS — the inside story straight from **George Perez** and **Roy Thomas** (again, we were first — and, incidentally, that collector's item issue is already selling at some shops for $3 a copy). But we also offered you the kinds of inside-the-industry interviews you don't see anywhere else — visits with publishers, editors, agents and operatives here and abroad, from every walk of comics life. All told, including this anniversary issue, we've interviewed more than *seventy* people about the

comics field . . . and as I've said before, we've only scratched the surface!

Our wide-ranging coverage of all aspects of comics has earned us a warm reception, inside and outside the industry, with kind words from so many — among them **Don Thompson, Bud Plant, Dave** and **Deni Sim, Tony Isabella,** and the **Pinis.** Most surprising and gratifying are **Stan Lee's** comments: "COMICS INTERVIEW is probably the most interesting and absorbing fanzine of all. It just seems to get better with each issue."

Yet all this is not to say we haven't had our problems. Feedback from our readers indicates frustration at not always being able to find COMICS INTERVIEW on sale in shops. Copies sometimes sell so fast that readers miss an issue they're searching for.

For example, with COMICS INTERVIEW # 6, which cover-featured the JLA/AVENGERS, shortages were instantaneous. An east coast distributor sold out completely in less than one week. In Illinois, copies never even reached many shops. In the south, one loyal reader went so far as to buy the "bathroom" reading copy from a shop.

These are just a few of the letters we've received:

"I've been disturbed by the difficulty I've had finding every issue at the local comic shops. There are two generally well-stocked comic shops within walking distance of my home, and both shops carry COMICS INTERVIEW on occasion, but I've really got to keep my eyes peeled."

— **Mark Burbey**
San Francisco, CA

"In Knoxville COMICS INTERVIEW sells very well. However, availability is not good due to the relative inability of our distributor to back-order issues. Often, CI sells out . . . I think you are aware of this problem . . ."

— **Mark Derrick**
Knoxville, TN

"Enclosed is a check for COMICS INTERVIEW #5, I can't seem to find a copy of it anywhere. I was at Creation Thanksgiving in NYC on Nov 26 and couldn't catch a copy of it there . . ."

— **Gary Peterson**
West Babylon, NY

"Please send me issue #6 of COMICS INTERVIEW. All the comics shops sold out of this issue."

— **Richard D. O'Neill**
Chicago, IL

On the one hand, it's wonderful news that COMICS INTERVIEW sells well and is in such demand — but, on the other hand, it's very frustrating to us that many of you can't find copies, even when you want to.

There is something *you* can do to help solve this situation — and it's simple.

Please make your local comics dealer aware of your interest in this magazine. Ask for COMICS INTERVIEW by name, and if you don't see it, make a point of requesting that your shop order *more* copies.

Of course, should all else fail, you can always obtain issues directly from us — but if the comics field is to grow and prosper, your local shop or subscription service needs your business. So let them know that you want COMICS INTERVIEW — don't let them run short.

And thanks again for making our first year such a success. Here's to many more!

-Dan'l D

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As fellow collectors, we ran into several problems in trying to order our comics through other subscription services. Ordering directly from the publisher locked us into a year long subscription and when ordering from a service, we felt we were catering to their rules rather than getting individualized service.

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Ramon & Shawnee

"The time was right for such a series."

POWER PACK

Photo: Roy Richardson

JUNE BRIGMAN

Louise Jones is a well-known editor (X-MEN, CONAN), recently turned freelance writer (under her marriage name, "Louise Simonson" — she's Walt's wife). June Brigman is a hitherto-unknown young artist, recently turned comic-book professional. They've teamed up to produce Marvel's latest series, POWER PACK. Our globe-trotting correspondent, D. Jon Zimmerman, cornered Louise and June in Marvel's Manhattan offices, to learn the story behind this saga of super-powered sub-teens . . .

D. JON ZIMMERMAN: *This is your first big project for Marvel, isn't it?*

JUNE BRIGMAN: I've done a short story for the DC tryout book, a story for Americomics, a CONAN story and an IRON MAN fill-in, but this is my first regular series.

Z: *What did you do before you got into the comic-book business?*

JUNE: Blue-collar labor. I was going to Georgia State and I waitressed when I wasn't a student. I finished my freshman year in art when I started getting interested in comic-books.

Z: *What comics caught your eye?*

"I put a lot of myself into Jack.

JUNE: I guess the older ones. Let's see . . . **Wrightson's** SWAMP THING was probably the first. **Gil Kane's** and **Neal Adams'** work for GREEN LANTERN . . . **Gene Colan** in DRACULA and I also remember liking **Joe Kubert's** TARZAN.

Z: *Did you find yourself trying to imitate any of those styles?*

JUNE: At first I guess the artist I tried to imitate was **Gil Kane.** But since I had been drawing practically all my life, and didn't start looking at comics until I was a freshman in college, I already had a style of my own. So it wasn't straight copying of his work. I don't think, when you look at the pages of POWER PACK, that you'll see a heavy influence by any one artist. I hope I have my own look. I've seen a lot of other artists who turned out to be **Neal Adams** clones or **John Buscema** clones. Because of that, I was afraid to study any one artist too much.

Z: *How long was it from the time you started drawing comic-book style art to the time you presented it in New York?*

JUNE: Oh, I guess you'd have to say it was four years. And this was off-and-on work at it. I mean, it probably wouldn't have taken me so long if I had been able to, y'know, live at home and not have to pay rent and just sit and draw comics.

Z: *The needs of the real world had to be met.*

JUNE: Right. And I was still trying to go through the University school system. So it really wasn't a full-time commitment until about a year ago.

Z: *Moving up to that time, was that when you met Louise Jones?*

JUNE: I met Louise in March of 1983. That's when I came to New York City, and showed my work at Marvel. And she was the first editor I saw. I guess it was because her office was at the end of the hall, closest to me when I came in. It sure was a good thing, too, considering what eventually happened. Louise didn't have any work at the time, but she did mention the Power Pack concept. She asked me if I could draw children. I told her I could. I'd worked one summer out in an amusement park doing pastel portraits. Every parent wanted his kid's portraits done. Of course, the kids wouldn't sit still. So you had to do the portrait half out of your head and half from what you had in front of you.

So after I was finished showing my work at Marvel, I went back to my friend's apartment, where I was staying in New York, and did some sketches of the Power Pack kids. I then returned to Louise and showed her the stuff and she liked them a lot. When I got back to Atlanta, I did some more character sketches, costume designs and things like that. Louise called me, I guess it was a month later, and said that **Jim Shooter** had approved the idea to make POWER PACK a regular series.

Z: *What was your reaction to that?*

JUNE: I was really surprised. I didn't think anything would come of what I'd done. I thought **POWER PACK** was a great idea and the time was right for such a series, but I didn't think it would happen so fast. It's worked out real well. But I have to say that I didn't think that when I got into comics that I'd be drawing little kids.

Z: *How soon did the first plot for POWER PACK come in after you got the notice?*

JUNE: I started working on the first issue the end of June, 1983. I think Louise is up to the sixth plot now. And I'm just in the middle of pencilling the second one. She's kind of hard to keep up with.

Z: *You were still in Atlanta at this time. You two must have talked a lot on the phone.*

JUNE: Yeah. I guess once I realized I'd have regular work, and also since my boy friend had inked an **IRON MAN** annual, we felt that if we moved now to New York, at least we wouldn't go broke. So we went ahead and made the move.

You can only communicate so much over the phone. It seems you can get things done better in person.

Z: *What sort of working relationship do you and Louise have?*

JUNE: Well, we really have not had any trouble. Louise is real agreeable — in fact, sometimes she's too agreeable. She should, I feel, argue more and bitch more. Sometimes I think Louise makes the kids seem too nice. She bases them a little, I think, on her childhood. And apparently she just got along wonderfully — had a perfect relationship — with her siblings. I think that's sort of unusual. I know I argued a lot with my brother and sister. And from what I hear about most kids growing up, it's sort of amazing that they even survive childhood. So sometimes I have to convince Louise to make the kids gripe at each other and call each other names so they won't appear too sweet.

Z: *Louise told me that one of the things that really impressed her about your drawings of the Power Pack was the way you captured the essence of the characters in their faces. She said you*

Jack and Julie, two of the POWER PACK kids.

© 1984 MCG

That's because he's sort of a punk."

were able to put down on paper the image of them she had in her mind.

JUNE: Yeah. The oldest boy and the oldest girl are based kinda on how I looked at that age. But really, Louise has been real good at putting pictures into my head. I put a lot of myself into Jack. That's because he's sort of a punk. A smart-ass to his older brother and sister. He's kind of feisty because he's younger. I was the baby of my family. And I think because I was rather spoiled, I felt I had something more to prove because I was following in my brother's and sister's footsteps. Louise seems real satisfied with what I'm doing, and I'm glad for that.

Z: *How do you do research for POWER PACK?*

JUNE: A lot of times I try to just watch and listen to kids. I want to pick up on the way kids really talk and act. It's so surprising sometimes at how grown-up kids can really be. We'll be doing everything we can to keep the POWER PACK acting like modern-day kids.

Z: *Considering what happens to them are you going to have some serious problems dealing with a "loss of innocence" that is so important to children?*

JUNE: Right. That's something that Louise will bring out a lot in the fourth issue. Louise and I are beginning to get a hold on just what the kids' personalities are like. I think they will handle some of the problems better than grown-ups might.

Z: *Adapting easier because they've not had that much experience with a normal life?*

JUNE: Exactly. They are growing and changing . . . and these powers are just

A Snark.

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PENCILS: JUNE BRIGMAN
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"'Whitey' would not gross out little kids."

"Whitey," the good alien.

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something that they will learn how to handle

Z: *Even so, they must still have some traumatic moments.*

JUNE: Well, Katie is the youngest one, she is a spoiled brat. She's used to charming others to get her way, and when that doesn't happen, she'll throw a temper tantrum, which, with her energizing power could really have some dangerous consequences.

Also, in the fourth issue we begin to start dealing with the problems of this "loss" by having Katie lose a tooth — which is such a normal, everyday thing for a child — but she loses it under some really bizarre circumstances.

Z: *Is there anything you're particularly proud of in the first issue?*

JUNE: Well, I like "Whitey," the good alien whose name we still haven't decided on and who gives the kids their powers. He gets killed in the first issue, but thank goodness there's going to be some of his relatives coming back in a later issue. I say "Thank goodness" because I went through a lot of trouble trying to figure out how to draw a "good" alien.

Z: *How so?*

JUNE: It had to be something that would not gross out the kids. **Carl Potts,** the editor, is really into aquatic creatures, and he gave me all sorts of books on sea life for possible inspiration, and I finally decided on something based on a sea horse.

Z: *How about the Snarks?*

JUNE: Well, these are really going to be mean. In fact, Carl and I would both like to see them animated because they have such bizarre looking legs. They look half-lizard, half-roach. The Snarks are pretty scary, especially when they stand up on their hind feet because they are so huge.

Z: *Have you talked to other artists since you moved to the New York area?*

JUNE: Well, it is real nice knowing Louise since **Walt Simonson** is her husband, because he was one artist that I had always wanted to meet.

"I don't want readers to discount

LOUISE SIMONSON says...

Z: *Did he give you any suggestions?*

JUNE: I tell you, Walt is not too critical. Even Louise complains that he just won't give her any criticism. He looked through my last issue and told me that I didn't always pull back enough in my shots to give the reader the whole picture of what's going on. I have had problems with that. It may have come from studying **Gil Kane** too much. Gil always manages to crowd his panels and sometimes I would do too many close-ups. So that one suggestion was a lot of help. I guess the main help was just talking with him and seeing his work and how he worked.

For instance, Walt starts with just a real loose layout where figures and faces aren't important. They are just shapes on the page. His drawing really seems to take second place to his design which is so interesting and so strong. It is just like **Jack Kirby's.** You know, Walt does some weird things with anatomy, but the figures are so strong and the poses and the dynamics are so good, that it doesn't matter. I'd like to get more of that kind of stuff in my work. But, I figure that the more I keep working and studying, my art will just take its direction naturally.

Z: *Have you had any deadline problems yet?*

JUNE: Unfortunately, yes. *(Laughter.)* In fact, if I keep going like I am I might wind up being more an irregular artist than a regular artist. But our schedule is set up so far ahead that I don't see any trouble getting the book on the stands when Marvel wants it to appear, and keeping it going with the same team. The first issue is being inked right now, and I'm already behind. And that is causing the predictable problems between me and my editor. But, I'll just have to work it out the best I can. I do have to say that I am real slow. I'm just going to have to draw faster if I'm going to survive in the business.

Z: *What's the biggest difficulty you've had with the art?*

JUNE: Well, it's not so much trouble as it is painstaking. Storytelling hasn't given me too much trouble. I hope everything, visually, will be clear. At least, Louise thinks it will be. On the first issue she just had me change a couple of things that she felt were a little vague. I want everything to look right. And, unfortunately, that just takes a lot of time.

D. JON ZIMMERMAN: *When did you first get the idea for POWER PACK?*

LOUISE SIMONSON: When I was growing up, I liked reading about people my own age. So I guess doing a comic book about a group of super-heroes who were children always appealed to me. And, some time back, I got the idea about doing a group who were a good deal younger than the New Mutants. I can't give you a precise date, but it certainly harkens back to the stories I enjoyed when I was a child. I was working on the background material off-and-on between my editor's duties, getting down the kids' identities, what their powers were . . . and was in my office when **June Brigman** from Georgia came through with some art samples she was showing everyone. June agreed to make some sketches of the kids, just to see how it would work out. And she did and the drawings were absolutely dead on! They were wonderful! They were beautiful drawings! I knew what their souls were like, but June gave them faces.

Z: *Who are the characters in POWER PACK?*

LOUISE: The four children are brothers and sisters. Their last name is Power — thus Power Pack. The oldest one's name is Alex. His super-hero name is Gee. His is the power to control gravity. Alex can enlarge the gravitational field that he projects. The result is that he can pick up any object no matter how big or heavy it is. So, for instance, he can pick up a truck, but if he were to let the truck go, and he was under it, the vehicle would smash him. He is not invulnerable.

Alex is studious. He's got a lot of the, oh, expectations that parents usually put upon the oldest child. He's expected to be self-controlled, well-behaved, thoughtful, far-thinking — all the things that the oldest child is supposed to be. He's about eleven. He's not very athletic, as opposed to his little brother, whom we'll hear about later, who is a real hunk of a little kid . . . a Wolverine. *(Laughter.)*

Now, the next oldest one's name is Julie. She's around ten — ten and a half. She's the artistic, creative, dreaming one. She's smart. She's probably as smart as Alex is, but she's inclined to be a lot more interested in fantasy and romance than she is in reality. Julie's super-hero name is Lightspeed, because she can fly really, really fast.

Z: *Who's next?*

LOUISE: The next one is Jack. Jack is athletic and refuses to be either smart or charming, although he is capable of being both. He can't quite decide what his name should be. Jack can get very very small and dense, and hard — or he can become very large and cloudlike. And, when he

POWER PACK because it features kids."

turns into his cloud-like form, he goes through his clothes and they fall off.

Z: *That can be embarrassing.*

LOUISE: *(Laughter.)* Right. Well, he'll have a super-hero uniform that can adapt to his form, so it all works out.

The youngest one in the group — there are four — is Katie. Katie's super-hero name is Energizer. She's a human battery. She absorbs the energy that holds molecules together, thus disintegrating the object she's holding and absorbing the energy. She "powers up" until she virtually glows with energy. And then she can shoot off bolts of energy. The bolts can blow holes in the sides of, oh, things like starships. She's the most powerful of the group. And she's only five years old.

Z: *Given the fact that these kids receive such tremendous powers, at such an early age, this must create some emotional problems for them.*

LOUISE: Yes, it does. Katie is going to start having some very powerful nightmares. In the middle of the nightmare, she might absorb energy from things like the bed and try to use it to defend herself, with the results that she blows holes in the walls of her room. Or, if she's angry, she might lash out inadvertently against anyone, including her parents. Her big mission in life will be to try to learn some self-control, which she has never really had to learn before.

Z: *They also must have problems dealing with a "loss of innocence."*

LOUISE: Yes, in a way, I think this will be particularly hard on Julie. She may eventually realize that she's . . . she really likes her fantasy life, and may come to really feel the loss of it as a result of getting this power she has. When fantasy impinges on reality as it has done for her, it will be really hard for her to accept what has happened.

Also, because they now have such abilities, they are actually able to truly live out a fantasy. That presents its own set of disorienting problems. Jack, however, will be unmoved by it all. At least, that is what he will be trying to project to the outside world. All will have different, reactions to what has happened to them. Alex is going to be very serious about it. And responsible. Because that is what the oldest one is. He will tend to conceal things inside. He has to — he's the oldest. He must always be in control and in command. Always. The poor little guy. Sometimes life is hard.

Z: *Will they have anyone they can talk to for advice?*

LOUISE: Well, at first, not really. Initially the kids decide that it would be a bad idea for their parents to know about their super-powers. What they will have is Friday, the "intelligent" spaceship that belonged to "Whitey" — the good alien who gets killed in the first issue. He's the alien, by the way, who gives the kids their powers. Anyway, Friday is not a mentor to the kids. Friday can provide information, if asked — sometimes she can volunteer it. She has more knowledge than they do, but it is stored in her computer banks. She has been to other worlds, can speak alien languages and stuff like that. But, she's really just one of the gang.

Mostly, the kids have to talk their problems over amongst themselves. And they have to decide amongst themselves what to do.

Z: *You've been showing a lot of enthusiasm for POWER PACK during this interview.*

LOUISE: Yeah, because it's an awful fun project. It's my first series. In fact, it is more or less the first thing that I've written. I was putting so much energy into the editing, that I had no real time. With POWER PACK, I'm going freelance. And, it is such a load off my mind. It is very hard writing and editing at the same time. Particularly if you want to do a good job with both. I don't see how **Denny O'Neil** can do it. He's writing two books a month and editing a whole line as well! Oh, that would kill me!

Z: *And keeping everything on schedule?*

LOUISE: Well, Denny's never on time. *(Laughter.)* None of the editors who write are on time with their stories. The editors are the latest in the house. Any project an editor is working on, you can be sure is generally as late as it can be. But, of course, since they are in the office, you can at least find them and hound them.

Z: *Getting back to POWER PACK, any last words to the potential readers?*

LOUISE: Yes, I don't want them to automatically discount POWER PACK because it features little kids. There's a lot of stuff going on that will appeal to everyone. And wait until they see the art — it's beautiful!

By Gary Cohn, Dan Mishkin, Paris Cullins and Pablo Marcos.

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"An editor asked me, 'How'd you like to write comics?' I asked, 'What are comics?'"

GARDNER FOX

MY FINGERS FALL FROM THE TYPEWRITER KEYS... I STRETCH AND LET THE CREATIVE TENSION DOZE AWAY. MY NAME IS GARDNER FOX -- ONE OF THE WRITERS OF THE BATMAN STORIES...
THAT WINDS UP ANOTHER BATMAN YARN! I JUST HOPE THE READERS GO FOR THE BOUNCER AND BATMAN'S WAY OF OVERCOMING HIM!

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Of comics' Golden Age, it may truly be said, "There were giants in those days." One such giant was Gardner Fox, an incredibly prolific and durable writer who not only gave the Golden Age of the Forties some of its most noteworthy heroes but helped launch the Silver Age of the Fifties, and whose influence in comics is still being felt to this day.

Gardner's list of achievements in comics is truly titanic. He is the creator of both the Justice Society and Justice League of America, the original Flash and Hawkman, the first Ghost Rider, the modern Hawkman and Atom, Dr. Fate, Adam Strange, The Shining Knight, and a host of lesser-known but still fondly-remembered worthies such as Steve Malone, Pow Wow Smith and The Gay Ghost. He's scripted BATMAN, SUPERBOY, the modern FLASH, DR. STRANGE, THE ELONGATED MAN, HOPALONG CASSIDY, and a passel of westerns, barbarian yarns, science fiction tales and horror pieces for DC, DC, Marvel, Warren, Columbia and Skywald. He created the Earth-One/Earth-Two concept and coined the terms. In his JLA and JSA stories he took stands on bigotry, totalitarianism, intolerance and the plight of the handicapped decades before people were talking about "relevancy" in comics.

Retired from comics today, Gardner remains a highly active writer, producing historical, sword-and-sorcery, science-fiction and romance novels. Gardner rarely gives interviews, so I consider myself both fortunate and honored to have had this informal chat with one of the most revered figures in the history of comics.

-- Lou Mougin

VITAL STATISTICS

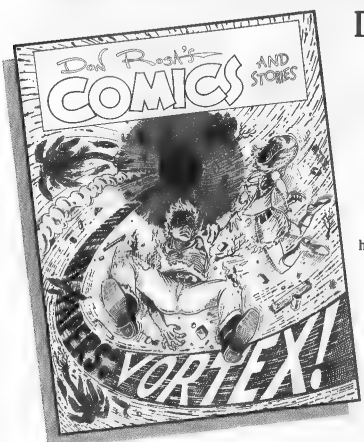
Name: Gardner Francis Fox
Occupation: Writer
Birth: 20 May 1911 — Brooklyn, NY
Residence: Cranbury, NJ
Credits: FLASH, HAWKMAN, DR. STRANGE, DETECTIVE COMICS, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, WEREWOLF BY NIGHT, BRAVE AND BOLD, TOMB OF DRACULA and literally thousands of comic books and stories over the course of more than thirty years.

LOU MOUGIN: *What have you been doing for the last ten years, since you left comics?*

GARDNER FOX: Writing novels. I sold my first novel back in 1953.

DON'T GET SUCKED INTO THE BLACK HOLE!

AS IT COLLIDES WITH THE EARTH IN ISSUE #2 OF



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Comics fans see (Keno) Don Rosa's name everywhere these days. His column appears regularly in THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, his newspaper strip, CAPTAIN KENTUCKY, runs in THE COMIC READER, his drawings appear regularly in AMAZING HEROES, and this is the second issue of his own comic from Fantagraphics Books. You'll see influences ranging from Carl Barks to Will Elder to Jay Ward to Herge in DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES. If you read comics for outrageous adventure, tongue-in-cheek humor, fast-paced storytelling, and non-stop action and fun, DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES fits the bill.

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"Superheroes were my wish-fulfillment figures."

LOU: *Yes, I've been reading one of your old ones — IVAN THE TERRIBLE. It's pretty good. What was the most recent novel you published?*

GARDNER: It was a romance under the name of "Lynette Cooper." I've done about twelve under that name.

LOU: *What did you do before you became a writer?*

GARDNER: Well, I graduated from law school in 1935, was admitted to the New York Bar and practiced law for a year or two. And then in December 1937 — a month after my marriage — my old friend **Vince Sullivan,** who was an editor at Columbia, got in touch with me and asked, "How would you like to write for comics?" I asked him, "What are comics?" He explained that they're original illustrated stories, somewhat similar to the comic strips appearing in the daily newspapers but published in the form of books. So I wrote my first story, "Steve Malone: District Attorney," for DETECTIVE COMICS. I got paid in early January, 1938, and then I went on to write four thousand two hundred comic books! (Laughter.) About mid-'38 I started working for **Charlie Gaines'** All-American line and created Hawkman and Flash for them.

Rarely seen today: Batman carrying a gun. From a Gardner Fox story in DETECTIVE #32. Art by Bob Kane.

LOU: *I remember reading the story of you seeing a bird picking up a twig outside and that's how you came up with Hawkman.*

GARDNER: That's the way the story runs, yes. With Flash, **Shel Mayer** and I got together about doing a comic book hero and we decided on somebody who was very fast — so I began writing the Flash.

LOU: *Hawkman and Flash pretty well anchored All-American as a viable company.*

GARDNER: That's right. I wrote practically everything in FLASH COMICS.

LOU: *Jim Steranko says that the creation of the Justice Society was a crowning achievement and I'm pretty much inclined to agree with him. Can you give me an idea of how the JSA came about?*

GARDNER: Charlie Gaines called us, Shelly and me, together and said he wanted to do something as a companion to the Superman and Batman stories that were coming out in books of their own. We decided to take all the super-heroes

Splash-page art for Hawkman story by Gardner. Art by Joe Kubert.

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AC
BOLT
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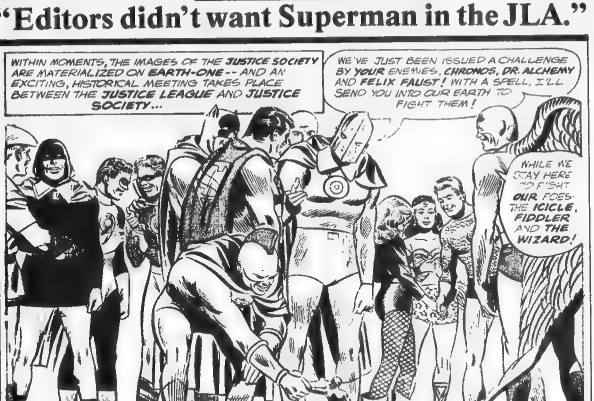
NEW FROM
AC COMICS
WILL BOLT SAVE THE WORLD
...OR DESTROY IT?

"Editors didn't want Superman in the JLA."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WHILE WE STAY HERE TO FIGHT OUR FOES: THE ICICLE, FIDDLER AND THE WIZARD!

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Heroes of the Golden and Silver Ages hobnob for the first time in the 1963 Gardner Fox story, "Crisis on Earth One," from JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #21. Art by Mike Sekowsky and Bernard Sachs.

that we had and form them together into a society.

LOU: *Did you enjoy scripting JSA more than any other feature?*

GARDNER: I enjoyed them all. I suppose I've been asked again and again who my favorite was, and I always had a soft spot in my heart for Adam Strange, but I liked them all — whatever one I was doing at the moment, I liked best.

LOU: *Well, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about Dr. Fate, who is one of my favorite JSAers.*

GARDNER: Well, Dr. Fate was my own invention. I first titled him "Dr. Droom," but I think Shelly changed the title to Dr. Fate, which was a better title. I give full credit to the artist for visually designing the character, but I remember that the mask was my idea.

LOU: *Did you have H. P. Lovecraft in mind when you scripted him? I remember some of the characters' names seemed right out of the Cthulhu Mythos.*

GARDNER: I always liked **Lovecraft** and **Robert E. Howard** and all the other fellows that used to do the old WEIRD TALES, which I used to read all the time, so naturally that had to sink in.

LOU: *You also did a few stories for EC, didn't you?*

GARDNER: Oh, yes, when **William Gaines** took over for his father. They were weird sort of things — terror stories. And I did a batch of things for them, I also wrote all the Moon-Girl stories for them. My work for other companies kept me so busy that I never really did many stories for EC.

LOU: *Let's move on to a little of the Silver Age. Was Adam Strange a John Carter derivative?*

GARDNER: I suppose you could probably say **John Carter** was in my subconscious. You had to think of some interesting way to transfer him from Earth up to the planet Rann before you even got started in on a plot, but it was fun to do.

LOU: *It was fun to read. Another one of my favorite DC series was the JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA. I once heard Mike Sekowsky say he was surprised when that one took off. How did JLA come about?*

GARDNER: JLA - that's the modern one, right?

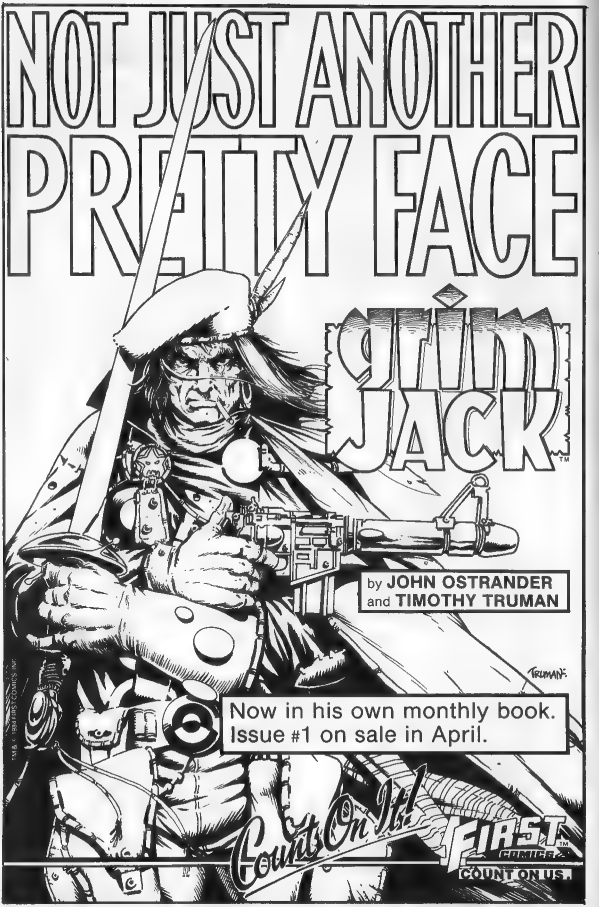
LOU: *Yeah, not the JSA.*

GARDNER: I always confuse the two. (Laughter.) Well, I think the editors decided on the concept and gave it to me to write. It was just a matter of modernizing the characters. I did the new Hawkman for BRAVE AND BOLD, then the new Atom and the new Flash, and then we put all the characters in the same book. At first they didn't want Superman or Batman involved, because they didn't want to saturate the market with those two. But after a while they relaxed that, and Superman and Batman were allowed in.

LOU: *So that was your first chance to write characters such as J'onn J'onnz and Wonder Woman?*

GARDNER: That's right. I had to study up on them and learn their powers, and then fit them into the stories.

LOU: *How did the JLA/JSA team-ups that started in JLA #21 come about?*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"I always had a soft spot for Adam Strange."

GARDNER: It stemmed from my story in FLASH called "Flash of Two Worlds," in which the new Flash crossed over into a parallel world and met the old Flash from the 1940s. We then got the idea of having the old JSA members meet the JLA.

LOU: *My favorite stories of yours have always been the moralistic ones that you did for the JSA and the JLA. You know, like, "A Place in the World," and "The Indestructible Creatures of Nightmare Island," where the villain was trying to give the world a conscience, "Man, Thy Name is Brother," and "The Test of Time." In fact, Jerry Bails credited that last JSA story that I mentioned with changing his life. What kind of religious and moral background do you have and what in particular motivated you to write these powerful stories?*

GARDNER: Well, I'm a Roman Catholic, as far as religion goes. I believe in the brotherhood of man and peace on Earth. If I could do it with a wave of my hand I'd stop all this war and this silly nonsense of killing people, so I used the super-heroes' powers to accomplish what I couldn't as a person. The super-heroes were my wish-fulfillment figures for benefitting the world.

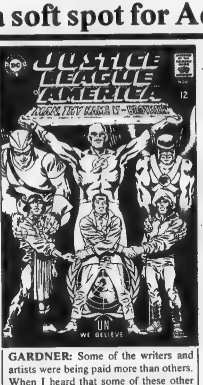
LOU: *Well, I really enjoyed reading them, especially since super-heroes in the other companies were all just "Smash! Bang! Boom!" and not much more substance to them. Did you get any official recognition for any of these stories?*

GARDNER: Oh, yeah. I have about four or five plaques on the wall. I got a big tall award from Skycon, and I won the Alley Oop award.

LOU: *In JLA #40, with the "Indestructible Creatures" story, you pictured all the leaders of the modern world's religions — like Jesus and Buddha and Moses — and that was the first time I'd ever seen them pictured in a super-hero comic. Were these stories plotted by you and Julie and Mike Sekowsky?*

GARDNER: Oh, not with Mike. Julie and I always plotted them. I'd bring in the plot around nine and then we'd kick it around and add to it, or subtract from it, until lunch. That's really all I remember. If I'd known these things — how I plotted and so forth — were going to be important someday, I'd have made notes at the time so I could've answered questions about them twenty or thirty years later. (Laughter.)

LOU: *Why did you finally leave DC in 1969?*



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GARDNER: Some of the writers and artists were being paid more than others. When I heard that some of these other fellows who worked for **Jack Schiff** were being paid more than me I felt very uncomfortable about it, and didn't see why that should be. So we writers decided to form a little union, you might say. **Jack Leibowitz** didn't look upon that very kindly, and as a result I was told that I wasn't going to work with Julie any more; **Carmine Infantino** became the big poobah, and he said to me, "You'll be working with **Mort Weisinger,** not Julie any more." I said, "To Hell with that." (Laughter.) So I quit.

LOU: *Was that about the sum of your total involvement with Mort Weisinger?*

GARDNER: I never worked with him much. Very early on, like about 1940, when he first came there, I did some stories for him, but by the late 1940s I was pretty exclusively involved with working with **Julie Schwartz.**

LOU: *What was it like, working with Julie?*

GARDNER: Oh, wonderful. You had to keep your nose to the grindstone, but what the heck — that was his job, to make sure that everything was as good as he could make it. I enjoyed working with him.

LOU: *So after the DC shake-up, about 1971, you came to Marvel for a while?*
GARDNER: Yeah. I stayed for a little while scripting WEREWOLF BY NIGHT and DR. STRANGE and TOMB OF DRACULA.

LOU: *What were the circumstances of your short stay there?*
GARDNER: I worked for a year or two, then I wanted to concentrate on writing novels, so I just faded out of the picture.
LOU: *Of all the artists who have given life to your many scripts, who sticks out in your mind as your favorite?*
GARDNER: That's a leading question. (Laughter.)
LOU: *I'm afraid it is.*
GARDNER: I thought **Infantino** and **Murphy Anderson** were pretty good, but I had no special favorites. I liked them all. I did think **Infantino** had a special touch, especially when I needed some very exotic-looking girl in the story. I'm no artist, and I would never compare the artists who did my stories. I'm sure they all did a good job. They'd had to, in order to stay at DC.
LOU: *What are your plans for the future?*
GARDNER: Loafing. (Laughter.) Actually, I am in my seventy-third year, and I plan, God willing, to write a book a year. But if I don't do it, that's all right, too. I want to enjoy life as it comes.

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EARTHMAN ADAM STRANGE RANN'S CHAMPION of CHAMPIONS

"THOR was the first Marvel Comic I ever

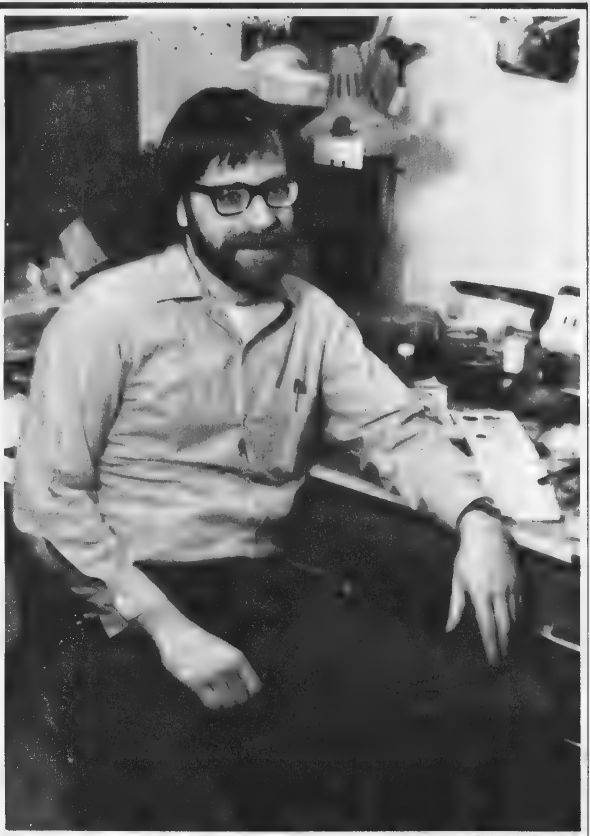

Photo: D. Jon Zimmerman

bought. Thor is my favorite super-hero."

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...AND THE MIGHTY THOR LIVES AGAIN!
IN DAYS OF YORE, MY FOLLOWERS DID CALL MY NAME AND EVEN IF I WERE WORLDS AWAY, I COULD HEAR THEM AND ANSWER IF IT PLEASED ME.

WALT SIMONSON

In the past few months, Marvel's long running mythological super-hero series, THOR, has suddenly become something of a comics phenomenon. There is a new direction to the Norse god's adventures and a new "look" to the artwork that have ignited widespread enthusiasm. Perhaps there is still a trace of Jack Kirby in these stories, but only in the dynamics and not in the style. For the style of the art and, yes, even the remarkable scope of the new storyline are now under the sole control of one man: artist/writer/creator Walt Simonson!

"Distinctive" is only one, but perhaps the best, word to describe Walt — from his bushy red beard, to his booming laugh, to his graphic storytelling style, right down to his dinosaur-shaped signature. Fellow comics professionals have appreciated Walt's work since the early days of his eleven years in the industry, but even though his MANHUNTER series and his ALIEN adaptation (both with writer Archie Goodwin) are considered milestones by his peers, each of them in Walt's words, "sank in the fan market." Yet someone out there must have taken special note of his efforts — ALIEN was the first comic book ever to make the NEW YORK TIMES bestseller list!

Since then, Walt's brand of comic-book magic has finally attracted the attention and acclaim it is due. For this interview, Jack C. Harris found Walt amid the orderly clutter of his studio, Upstart Associates, which Simonson shares with artists Howard Chaykin, James Sherman and, until recently, Frank Miller. Walt retraced with Jack the trail of India ink that led from early war and mystery stories for DC Comics, to Marvel's STAR WARS series to the X-MEN/TEEN TITANS team up . . . and now, to one of the smash hits of the season, his — you guessed it — distinctive (and mighty) THOR. It is actually the closing of a circle, in that THOR is now being guided by a man who, as a youth, was one of the Thunder God's most devoted fans . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Walt Simonson

Occupation: Artist, writer

Born: Knoxville, Tennessee. A great source of pride in the 1950s — it was near where Davy Crockett was born.

Residence: New York City

Training: Rhode Island School of Design.

Credits: MANHUNTER, ALIEN, STAR WARS, METAL MEN, THOR, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, X-MEN /TEEN TITANS. Illustrated Don McGregor's book, THE VARIABLE SYNDROME.

"I'm delighted to be taking THOR in

HEAR ME, THOR! COME OUT AND PLAY OR I WILL SLAUGHTER EVERY LAST MORTAL!
ARE YOU TOO MUCH A COWARD TO FACE ME?
BEWARE! NOTHING THESE PUNY HUMANS CAN DO CAN STOP ME!
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JACK C. HARRIS: *Why do you feel such a special affinity for Thor?*

WALT SIMONSON: Thor really is my favorite super-hero. THOR was the first Marvel Comic I ever bought, and even before I bought it I liked mythology a lot — Norse mythology, especially. I was delighted to find a comic about Thor, even if he didn't have a red beard, or wear iron gloves to catch the hammer, the way he did in the myths. I pencilled a year's worth of THOR with **Len Wein** writing, in 1977, and we did some of the old **Stan Lee**/**Jack Kirby** bits and added some new ones, and I was delighted with it. I am delighted now to have a crack at writing it, as well as drawing it, taking it in directions I've always wanted to see it go.

JACK: *How did you become writer-artist of THOR?*

WALT: It is kind of funny. Recently, I read in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE an editorial by Don and Maggie — that's **Don** and **Maggie Thompson**, whom I don't know, so of course I'm using their first names *(laughter)* — in which they said that someone in comics should take old books that are not doing very well and instead of giving them to people, who'll kill the books, give them to creative people with super-editor *carte blanche* to do whatever they want with the book. I thought it was hilarious, because five months before, when Marvel offered me THOR, *carte blanche*, to do whatever I wanted to do with it, it hadn't been doing very well. In fact, there had been talk about cancelling it. **Mark Gruenwald,** who was the editor, offered it to me, gave me some suggestions that were extremely *outre* — much more *outre* than anything I'm going to be doing in the foreseeable future — and essentially said to me, "Run with it." So Don and Maggie's editorial was anticipated by several months. But, hey, they didn't know what the deal was! So I may write them a letter. It was a great idea and I'm certainly happy to take advantage of it. No problem! *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *You said THOR was the first Marvel you ever read — what were the other comics you liked as a kid?*

WALT: Comics came in two stages. I got interested in reading comics at the age of eight or nine. My favorite stuff was the **Carl Barks** comics. My brother had a

Dr. Don Blake, mortal — and the immortal Thunder God. From THOR#337.

TO SEE THINGS NO MORTAL HAS EVER DREAMED OF.
DESPITE ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES, IT IS NO BAD THING TO BE THE SON OF LORD ODIN.
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directions I've always wanted to see it go."

subscription to WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES —

JACK: *You had to subscribe, because the damn things were continued!*

WALT: You got it! We also bought UNCLE SCROOGE and other things on the newsstand. Those **Barks** comics are the ones I remembered — and still remember a good deal of. There were individual comics that I loved. **George Evans** did THE THREE MUSKETEERS for CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED. That I loved, along with the stuff **Cameron** did — I didn't know his name then — for CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED: THE TIME MACHINE, THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, and THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO. I went off and read MONTE CRISTO, the book, because I read the CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED version — just like they told you to do in the back of the comics!

I was also a big LITTLE LULU fan, and still have some ROY ROGERS comics that **John Buscema** drew, and a movie adaptation, HELEN OF TROY, that John drew — a beautiful job. There was one comic that I loved and would give a lot to find today — I would trade a drawing for it. It was a one-shot, probably published by Dell in 1956, featuring a masked, Spanish-Californian bandit — sort of an evil Zorro — called "El Fuego." He carried a sword, wore a red mask that covered his entire face, and green, Spanish-cut clothing. A friend of mine had it and I would go back and re-read it over and over again.

JACK: *I had a comic like that. A TOM CORBETT set on Venus, which was shown as a swamp planet, with a castle in the middle of the swamp. I remember it as being absolutely great. Well, I finally got it years later, looked at the art — and it was terrible!* (Laughter.)

WALT: I may locate this comic and find that it was godawful. One comic I liked a lot was an **Alex Toth** job, a movie adaptation called FROM A LAND UNKNOWN. The movie was terrible — **Jock Mahoney** and a bunch of guys dressed up in dinosaur suits — but I loved the comic. So, since I liked **Alex Toth,** I seem to have had good taste at an early age — so maybe the "El Fuego" comic was good, too. I probably liked the **Toth** comic because it was about dinosaurs. I have drawn Tyrannosaurus Rex teeth like **Alex Toth** since about 1956! Giant spikes that just filled the mouth — although they probably didn't look like that in real life.

JACK: *Dinosaurs have always been a big interest of yours, haven't they?*

WALT: From about the third grade I

The Thunder God hurls himself into a new epic. From THOR #337.

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"I thought, 'I'll never work in comics!'"

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wanted to be a paleontologist and study dinosaurs.

JACK: *Every kid wanted to do that. Did you collect the ones out of the cereal boxes?*

WALT: Hey, all of that! Most kids go through that stage and then graduate from it, but I never did — not until much later. To this day, I can draw dinosaurs blindfolded. In fact, I can draw three-quarter views of dinosaurs on an Etch-A-Sketch! Anyway, I majored in geology at Amherst College. In paleontology, what you normally do is major in geology or biology as an undergraduate, and then go on to graduate school at Yale or Chicago or wherever. I graduated from Amherst in 1968, but just a couple of months before graduation, I had decided that I did not have enough interest in paleontology to pursue it as a career. It was a decision I took very seriously. I can remember staying up to three in the morning in my dorm room deciding not to go on to grad school.

JACK: *Were your parents supportive of your decision?*

WALT: They were always very supportive. When I was a kid and wanted books on dinosaurs that I just couldn't save up enough for out of my allowance, my father would help me pay for the books. They were very supportive when I decided to study geology in college. When I called them up to tell them of my decision not to go on to graduate school, there were no recriminations.

JACK: *Had you decided to become an artist instead of a paleontologist?*

WALT: At the time, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had always been interested in drawing, but had no interest in doing it professionally. After I graduated, I went to work in a bookstore for about nine months. It was great. I've always loved books. I became a pseudo-expert on almost everything simply by reading the backs of the books in the store. People would come in and ask for a book on Tasmanian Flagpole Sitting, and I'd say, "Oh, you mean that book by Yasur Gamel Paraffin?" Whoa! That'd blow 'em away. After about nine months there I decided to go to, or at least apply to, Art School.

JACK: *Why?*

WALT: Really, out of desperation. I didn't know what else to do. Because of my poor eyesight, the Army didn't want me, which didn't upset me at all *(laughter)*. I had decided not to be a geologist or a paleontologist, and I wasn't sure I wanted

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"I helped kill a lot of books. (Laughter.)"

to make a career out of drawing — but drawing was the only other interest I had.

JACK: *When did you start drawing?*

WALT: When I was five years old. I had mononucleosis — a marginal case, but enough to wipe me out — and I was home in bed with nothing much to do. I had liked drawing when I was much younger, but somehow had already quit along the way. My mom encouraged me and I began drawing again, partially to kill time, and kept drawing from that point on.

JACK: *Which art school did you go to?*

WALT: The Rhode Island School of Design. I got accepted to some New York schools, but I thought New York would be too much to take. Also, that was the year that some of the students got into the dean's office in one of the schools and ransacked the records. By the time they got back to me, I'd already decided to go to Rhode Island. I got in as a transfer student, an undergraduate, and majored in illustration. I ended up doing a comic book as my senior thesis!

JACK: *So you kept up your interest in comics all those years?*

WALT: Not really. I had quit reading comics when I was about eleven years old. When I was in my sophomore year in college, I discovered Marvel Comics, which I had never seen before. By that time, Marvel was well into its stride.

JACK: *Do you remember the exact moment you discovered Marvel?*

WALT: Oh, sure. There was a drugstore chain, the Drug Fair, that had newsstands carrying comics. This was in Washington, D.C. Almost nobody in the D.C. area carried comic books, except them. I discovered two THOR comics on the stand and I rode my bike back and forth — a distance of about five miles — four or five times to read those two comics. I finally decided, "This is stupid! Why don't I just buy them?" I spent many nights taking the family car and hitting the various Drug Fairs looking for comic books. What memories! So this began the second stage of my reading comics.

JACK: *You had a drawing printed in MAGNUS, ROBOT-FIGHTER, didn't you?*

WALT: Oh, yeah, that came at the end of my *first* comics-reading period! I liked **Russ Manning's** work on that title a lot. Somewhere along the way, I sent him a drawing of a robot — pencilled fairly tightly, I think, a pretty simple thing — and kept a copy for myself. And, lo-and-behold, a few months later, they printed for the first time a "Robot Gallery" showing drawings from the fans — and it included my robot! And it also included my signature, which is the earliest published version of it that I know. So that was my first published work in comics.

JACK: *It was the best one on the "Robot Gallery"!* (Laughter.)

WALT: Anyhow, as I became a comics reader again in college, I became much more interested in doing comics — in the storytelling, in the typography, composition, design and so forth. So in Art School I did a project over a two-year

Despite Walt's work on MANHUNTER and earlier issues of THOR, many fans first became aware of his art through his work on the historic X-MEN/TEEN TITANS team-up.

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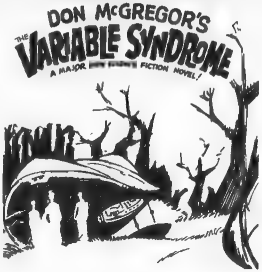

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"Professionally, MANHUNTER 'made' me."

period which I converted into my senior thesis, and that's what became THE STAR SLAMMERS. It was a fifty-page story being published, concurrently, in a small fanzine — offset, on legal paper folded in half, published in a Baltimore basement — which was tied into a science-fiction club I belonged to, called the Washington Science-Fiction Association. They were running the Slammers as part of a publicity campaign. They were bidding for the World Science Fiction Convention, and the stories — which came out every three or four months, and were distributed as freebies at various conventions — were tied into the theme, "D.C. in '74."

JACK: *Did they win the bid?*

WALT: Yes, they did, but I don't want to take major credit for it — although it does make a nice ending to the story! Those drawings became part of my portfolio when I came to New York in the summer of '72, looking for work, professionally, in comics.

JACK: *You went to DC first, didn't you?*

WALT: Yeah, because by that time I was more interested in what DC was doing. They had some young guys — **Wrightson, Kaluta** — that I thought were quite interesting. They were doing some neat stuff — THE HAWK AND THE DOVE, for example — not all of them successful, but more interesting than anything else going on in comics at the time. I wrote to them and asked for an appointment, and I got one with **Sol Harrison,** who was the production chief. I took my samples in — science-fiction art, which was pretty foolish of me since up to that time science-fiction had never done that well in comics, except for a few oddball things. The response I got was basically, "Well, this is nice, but what else can you do?" And I thought, "Oh, my God, it's company policy! I'm doomed! I'll never work in comics!" But later I got another appointment at DC, through a mutual friend, and I walked into a conference that was being held. **Kaluta** was there, **Wrightson,** I think **Chaykin** — I don't remember all the others. They asked to see my portfolio, which by this time I had revamped, and which contained the STAR SLAMMERS. It turned out that I was sitting with my back to **Jack Adler,** who was also in production — I don't know why all these production guys were always looking at art — **Michael Kaluta** asked me to show my stuff to Jack. I showed him a bound volume of the STAR SLAMMERS and Jack liked it a lot, and asked me if he could show it to **Carmine Infantino,** who was then publisher. Well! "You want to show my work

I'M PAUL KIRK.
YOU MAY KNOW ME AS MANHUNTER.
I KNOW YOU AS A MAN SAID TO BE RUTHLESS...
BUT THIS IS COLD-BLOODED MURDER! AS BAD AS THE ASSASSIN YOU'VE KI--
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to the head of the company? Hey, no problem!" *(Laughter.)* So Jack took the book off, disappearing for about five minutes — while I sweated blood — and came back, all in a rush, and in three seconds said, "Carmine-wants-you-let's-go!" — much faster than I can say it. I went into Carmine's office and he was looking at my stuff. He liked it a lot. We just chatted about comics for about ten minutes, and I told him a little about myself, and then he called in three of his editors and made each one of them give me a story before they walked out of his office! *(Laughter.)*

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JACK: *Who were the editors?*

WALT: Archie Goodwin, Julie Schwartz and **Joe Orlando.** The first three stories I did were all science-fiction jobs. By this time, I was canny enough to realize that I didn't want to become typed as a science-fiction artist, because there wasn't much of a market for that stuff. I knew a lot of artists who were typed. So I made some efforts to do other things — a couple of Gold Key jobs, which I won't name because I think the fanatics should go out and find them *(laughter).* I ghosted a panel here and there, and Archie eventually gave me a three-page Alamo story and I learned many years later that was the job that led him to give me the MANHUNTER series. Up to that time I had done mostly science-fiction, but that was a western and was a whole different gig.

JACK: *Was THE MANHUNTER your first series?*

"In THOR I'm using ideas I generated in the

WALT: Yes. I came to DC in August, 1972, and started working on MANHUNTER in March of 1973.

JACK: *How did you like it?*

WALT: I liked it a lot. I have never had a better working relationship with anyone than I had with **Archie Goodwin**, who wrote it. The stuff we did together is among the best things I've ever done. He just seems to be able to write to what I draw — or I draw to what he writes. I'm not sure. Eventually, it kind of feeds on itself. It was a very collaborative effort. The idea for MANHUNTER was all Archie's. I did costume design, and I think maybe by the later issues I was doing some of the plotting.

JACK: *You were telling him what you wanted to draw . . .*

WALT: Yeah, something like that. Like, in one case, I just loved this cathedral in town, and we worked out a story so that I could use it. We put it in Istanbul — but, hey, that's what comics are for!

JACK: *What kind of reaction did it get?*

WALT: We developed a small cult of fans who liked it a lot, but the fan market then was nothing like it is now. There were no direct-sales comic shops. Actually, for all but one issue, the strip was published in DETECTIVE — a 100-page Dollar Comic. They placed the Manhunter material in the back of a 100-page comic, which was a pretty obscure place to be. But I had a real good time, and I think Archie had a real good time, and I am still happy with the work we did. I was very proud of the work at the time — and still am. Professionally, that strip "made" me. My professional reputation was established.

JACK: *What did you work on after that?*

WALT: I jumped around, did a couple of jobs for Seaboard, one of the best things I've ever done, a *samurai* story called "Temple of the Spider." To me, it's still the high-water mark of what I was capable of doing then. I did an issue of DR. FATE with **Marty Pasko.** This was another job I'm proud of, but we were hamstrung in the middle of it! They went from 20 pages to 18, something like that, while we were in the middle of the story! We had to cut out two pages of plot. The plot was not, then, what we had hoped! *(Laughter.)* Marty and I also worked on METAL MEN together. I did five issues — two with Marty, two with **Gerry Conway** and one with **Steve Gerber.** That stuff was real cartoony and goofy, but a lot of fun. One thing I should say, I've been very fortunate in my career to be able to work with writers whose work I liked a lot and whom I felt did good work with me. I hope I was able to reciprocate. I've been very lucky in that respect. There are very few jobs that I look back at and cringe over.

JACK: *Somewhere along the way, you started working for Marvel . . .*

WALT: Yes, I did three issues of THE RAMPAGING HULK, and I did a thing with **Roy Thomas** that ran in six issues of SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN. It was a graphic treatment of an essay that **Robert E. Howard** wrote about the Hyborian Age. I got to work with **Archie Goodwin** again, this time on Marvel's adaptation of CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND. I'd quit inking my own work by the time I collaborated on THOR with **Len Wein.** The first book of my own art that I didn't ink was DC's HERCULES UNBOUND. **Wally Wood** was inking it, and the reason I took the job was to have Woody ink something I had done. Hercules was a goofy character, and the book was croaking even when I was doing it. I helped kill a lot of books in my time. *(Laughter.)* I had a great time with the character and I would love to go back and do it again, and just amplify it and enlarge the possibilities. But I was bouncing around and by the late 1970s, most of the work I was doing was for Marvel.

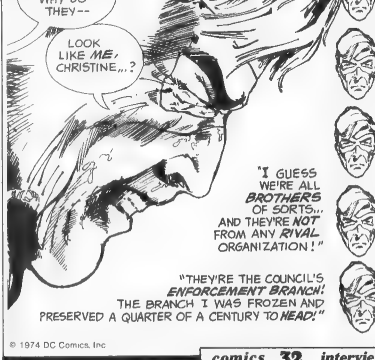
JACK: *Why?*

WALT: I was getting paid a lot better from Marvel than I was from DC, and those two were really the only options at the time. For those of you fans who are unaware of it, there was a time when only two companies existed. *(Laughter.)* At least, those were the only two companies that produced the kind of work I wanted to do — although I did a little work for Warren, in the late Seventies. All other things being equal, I would go to the company paying me the most money. And the things that were equal were working with good writers, and doing good projects that I was interested in. Nobody had a hammerlock on all the good writers or all the good projects.

JACK: *You also met your wife,* **Louise Jones,** *in comics, didn't you?*

WALT: Actually, when we first met, "Weezie" wasn't doing comics. She was working for a magazine. We met when I was doing MANHUNTER. She and

Previous page and below: Panels from MANHUNTER, by Archie Goodwin and Walt Simonson.


WHO ARE THEY?! WHY DO THEY--
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"I GUESS WE'RE ALL BROTHERS OF SORTS,,, AND THEY'RE NOT FROM ANY RIVAL ORGANIZATION!"
"THEY'RE THE COUNCIL'S ENFORCEMENT BRANCH! THE BRANCH I WAS FROZEN AND PRESERVED A QUARTER OF A CENTURY TO HEAD!"

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summer of 1967. I believe in re-cycling!"

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Anne Goodwin, Archie's wife, were good friends. After we met, a friend of Weezie's at Warren got her a job there in the production department, which was better paying than the job she had at the magazine. Then she shifted to editorial and worked her way up to Senior Editor. So we really didn't meet because of comics, except through **Archie** and **Anne Goodwin.** But it worked out real fine.

JACK: *How did you come to work on the comics adaptation of the movie, ALIEN?*

WALT: John Workman, the art director for HEAVY METAL, which was doing the adaptation, got in touch with me. I hadn't heard of the movie, but I don't keep real close track of the movie industry. He got in touch with me in October of 1978 and I think the movie was scheduled for a May 1979 release. He had other artists in mind besides me, but I ended up with the ball.

Twentieth Century-Fox gave me a script and I did a couple of scenes that I thought were neat, one of which was the "face-hugger" shooting out the egg. They liked the pages and said, "Fine." They gave me a tremendous amount of logistical support. I don't know when **Archie Goodwin** came in on it.

JACK: *It was a happy coincidence.*

WALT: It was. If I'd known he was going to be writing it, I would have been even more interested. That December, Archie gave me three versions of the script — and I was flown over to England to view a rough cut of the film, which was being edited over there at the time. So I saw some stuff that was not in the released version. Then we got a tour of the model shop and the studios.

JACK: *Were you sketching all the while?*

WALT: Sketching, and taking pictures. I saw them shooting a scene with the Alien, a quick face-shot that came in toward the end of the film. They had him run to the camera, K-Y jelly dripping all over his jaws. It was neat to watch. And when I came home they provided HEAVY METAL and me with tons of photographs and reference materials. I have worked on a lot of movie adaptations, and I've never worked on anything where we got the cooperation we got from Twentieth Century-Fox. I feel the comic really reflects it.

JACK: *What kind of fan response did it get?*

WALT: No fan response that I could detect, but it made the NEW YORK TIMES best-seller list. I'm willing to have a footnote in my biography: "This is the man who helped put a comic-book on the TIMES best-seller list." *(Laughter.)* I can live with that.

JACK: *And now you're working on another bestseller, THOR. What is it that you think you've brought to this book?*

WALT: Besides a spirit of enthusiasm — which I hope is contagious — a viewpoint on the character and the kinds of things he should be doing.

JACK: *And is THOR what you're mainly concentrating on now?*

WALT: Yes, I find that writing, pencilling

"I did a comic book as my senior thesis.

and inking a book is taking me longer than most of my other projects have. This is not a state of affairs that can continue indefinitely without my getting really late, but I think I can speed things up. I've been travelling a lot promoting the book and that's been cutting into my time, but fortunately, my travels are just about over for the foreseeable future. If I *had* to, I could give up inking it — but I really wouldn't want to.

JACK: *Do you have a set number of issues you want to do?*

WALT: They asked me to do a year's worth, just to keep a continuity of artist and writer, and I think that makes a lot of sense. In actual fact, I think I will do fourteen issues. My fourteenth issue will be #350, which is a nice round number. I can make a double issue of it and wrap up a bunch of things that I'm beginning now. Beyond that I don't have any idea how long I'll stay with it. On the basis of my first couple of stories, I've been asked to stay on as writer, even if I leave as artist. Maybe I'll do that. Maybe I won't. It's tempting, but so far off. The only problem for me right now is that comics have opened up so much in the past couple of years that there are so many different deals available, and so many different formats to work in, you can really do what you want to do. Or, at least, I can. I'd like to do some more STAR SLAMMERS, I'd like to do at least two graphic novels that I've got stories in mind for — but I cannot write, pencil and ink a monthly book and still do all those things. That's my problem. The one I wanted to do most was THOR — write it, draw it, and ink it, the way I had always wanted to see it written, drawn and inked — and I got the chance.

JACK: *How do you approach a story?*

WALT: When I'm writing and drawing a story — THOR, for example — I work out a plot first. The interesting thing with THOR is that the ideas I'm using now were ideas I generated in the summer of 1967! I believe in re-cycling! *(Laughter.)* I have this over-all framework for the stories that I worked out years ago, and I want to establish that in the stories I'm working on now. I'm not telling one big story — I'm telling a series of stories — but I want them to have a feeling of continuity. Of course, I have had to work out an idea of how to establish that framework while allowing for the fact that there's been fifteen years of continuity in the series since the ideas first came to me. I think I've been successful.

JACK: *Do you type up a script?*

WALT: What I do first is plot out the story completely. I may have ideas for scenes that I may be able to do brilliantly, but first I break down the plot into diagrams — little boxes, one box per page — in which I will write all the stuff that's gonna happen, and pace the story before I do any drawing. Then I will do thumbnails on sheets of paper about the size of typing paper. I'll do one sheet per page, doing little panels and figures. At this point, I will also be writing lines of dialogue in the margin, if any come to me. In some cases I may re-draw some scenes when brilliant lines of dialogue occur to me that I *have* to include and they don't fit. By this time I may be working back and forth — I may have to draw a scene, or I may have to change the plotting to incorporate a new way I want to do the pictures.

Once the thumbnails are done, I will write the story from the thumbnails. Essentially, what I try to do is to keep everything as loose as possible right up to the last moment, to allow for revisions, new ideas, new inspirations, whatever. It keeps the creative process lively along each step of the way and maintains a high flow of energy. I'll type the script up, give it to my editor so he can approve it, make changes, whatever. Once the script is written I'll blow the thumbnails up on a projector and trace them— tighten everything up, fine-tune the art, maybe change compositions.

JACK: *Do you give yourself an eight-hour day?*

WALT: I give myself a one-hour day when there's no deadline and a forty-hour day when there's a tight deadline. I'll be happy when I grow up and have a real life someday! So far, no go. *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *What about your future in comics?*

WALT: What I would like is for the market to stay as hot as it is now, or hotter, so that there is an opportunity for me to do all the things I want to do — more STAR SLAMMERS, a year's work on THOR, ten years, whatever interests me. Right now, my career is sort of a balancing act, where I want to do more things than time allows. I hope that eventually time will allow me to do all that and more!

Star Slammers

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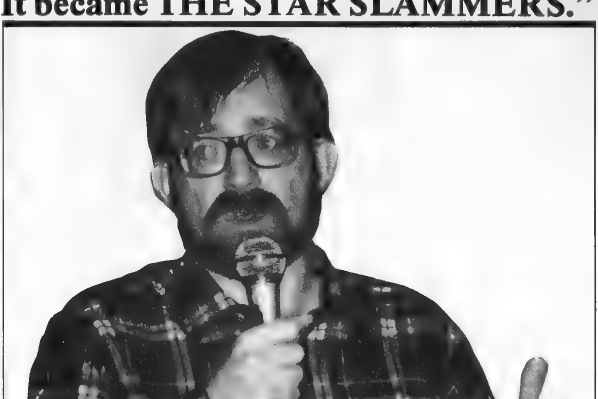
It became THE STAR SLAMMERS."



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As we went to press, we decided to include a surprise bonus in this special issue — a chance for Simonson to chat about specifics. Enterprising Steve Ringgenberg conducted his own interview with Walt, concentrating on the creation of STAR SLAMMERS and Walt's plans for the "new" THOR. This added insight into Walt's artistic and literary influences should delight devoted Simonson fans and fascinate serious students of graphic storytelling . . .

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *Is STAR SLAMMERS a hit?*

WALT SIMONSON: As far as I can tell, it's done very well. STAR SLAMMERS is the first graphic novel Marvel has done that wasn't connected with the Marvel Universe. The first printing sold out and they've gone back for a second printing on it.

STEVE: *How much of your original STAR SLAMMERS did you wind up integrating into the graphic novel?*

WALT: In terms of the plot, nothing. What I used from the original Slammers story were concepts, really. One was the concept of what the Slammers are, and what they do — a bunch of guys who just go out and kick ass. There's the concept of the Silvermind, kind of a hivemind, where the Slammers can really become almost this one large organic entity that sorts and distributes information in instants of time. In the original STAR SLAMMERS story the Slammers were already a completely functioning entity, and open for business on a regular basis. Originally, I envisioned the Slammers as army ants, in the sense that there were no individual characters, except one guy who was the commander. In a comic book, you really have to have at least somebody who can say things like: "Look! Bad guys! Let's get them!" One guy's got to act as an emotional lightning rod for the rest of them, so you can get an idea of how you're supposed to feel about what's happening to them. But even he wasn't really much of a character. Everybody was so cool and laid back that I doubt they were very interesting. I really kept the Slammers very much at arm's length, because I wanted to get that feeling of a large, almost anonymous mass of trouble. Now, in the graphic novel, my feeling is that you need more emotional involvement than that to be interested in what's going on. It's just not very interesting to watch numberless hordes of guys beating up a lot of other people. That's one reason why I focused very heavily on a few characters in the novel, but tried to give the sense that there were a lot of other guys out there behind them that you only saw briefly.

MORE ON ... THOR™

in Comics Collector - Summer 1984 Issue Available Nationwide April 17

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- **A glimpse at "Kondo"** — a comic book created by Walt Simonson and other comics professionals and fans at the World Science Fiction Convention in 1983. To date, only a handful of people have actually seen the comic book in its raw form, since it was circulated only among its creators. First time ever shown in a national newsstand publication!
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- **The Shadow** — he knows, he knows . . . and now so do we!
- **Comics lexicon** — definitions to all those crazy comics words.
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- **MLJ, Part 3-PEP comics** — another installment in the complete history of MLJ by Ron Goulart.
- **The Reuben Award** for cartooning.
- **An American look at Japanese comics.**

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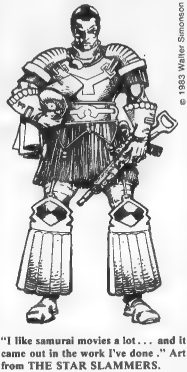
ACC

"I'm taking my *carte blanche* literally."

STEVE: *Were you influenced any by Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS?*

WALT: I read it — but whether before or after I wrote the original Slammers story, I don't recall. I know that I liked it, I have fond memories in particular of the opening sequence when they're all in armor and bouncing around, blasting fuel tanks and trashing a whole town. I did one illustration that I liked a lot and it was like that scene. It was also heavily influenced by the Titanium Man from IRON MAN. I had a guy wearing an armored outfit like the Titanium Man's, bouncing around and blowing things up like in STARSHIP TROOPERS. The only influence I am certain came from STARSHIP TROOPERS is the concept of army ants, although I probably was also influenced there by a great short story, "Leiningen Versus the Ants," which was made into a **Charlton Heston** movie, THE NAKED JUNGLE. I thought army ants were absolutely phenomenal — numberless as the grains of sand, an army against which nothing, not even larger animals, can stand. That concept is as much where STAR SLAMMERS came from as any one thing. A huge, voracious mass mind — millions of guys, and there's just no way to stop them. Funny, I hadn't even thought of the STARSHIP TROOPERS influence before you asked. Usually when people ask me about early influences on STAR SLAMMERS they ask me about . . .



© 1983 Walter Simonson

"I like samurai movies a lot . . . and it came out in the work I've done ." Art from THE STAR SLAMMERS.

STEVE: *Gordon Dickson?*

WALT: Hey, there you go! You got it — the DORSAI books! Actually, I've only read one, SOLDIER ASK NOT, and as best I can tell from my records — I keep records of every book I read, going back to 1970 — I read it a few months after I did the first Slammers drawings, that continuity strip that was printed in MARVEL AGE. Probably the DORSAI books were influential in a third-hand way, through word-of-mouth rather than me actually reading and digesting the things. I probably heard SF fans I knew saying things like: "Hey, these are great books, about a bunch of soldiers who go around doing terrible things to people!"

STEVE: *Besides literary influences, I'd like to discuss your artistic influences. Your style keeps changing, but there are certain things that are constant in the way you draw — that certain quality of line, and the way you use blacks or oppose the panels. Are you influenced at all by classical Oriental art?*

WALT: I'm not real familiar with it. I was recently asked, in fact, if I was heavily influenced by Japanese comic books. I doesn't appeal to me very much, but I like the continuity, the way the stories are told. It's nice to have 300 pages to tell a story so you can do all these neat breakdowns. I've really been exposed to very little classical or popular Oriental art, except samurai movies. I like samurai movies a lot. I went through a phase in the early '70s of attending Japanese film festivals here in New York, and I saw a lot of **Kurosawa** flicks, and a lot of the grade-Z films that were just a gas. Visually, I found them extremely exciting — the armor and the swords, the whole *ethos*, really. I probably absorbed a great deal from that, and it came out in the work I've done.

STEVE: *Who would you cite as an influence?*

WALT: Oh, gee! Here I was hoping that you'd give me a few names! It's kind of fun to see what people pick up on as my alleged influences. When **Carmine Infantino** interviewed me for my first DC job, he was telling me how much influence **Krigstein** had had on my work. At that time, I'd never *heard* of **Krigstein**! I was a little too young for EC Comics when they came out. What happened was that I had a real passion for line, as well as an interest in design, which were both aspects of **Krigstein's** work, so people assumed I was influenced by him. Since then, I've seen his art and been blown away by it. I'll swipe it whenever I can, but it's not saw a few when I was doing MAN-HUNTER. **Archie Goodwin** collected the "Lonewolf" series, the samurai-with-the-babycart stuff. The drawing and inking

Panel from THE STAR SLAMMERS illustrating the Silvermind, "a hivemind where the Slammers can become almost this one large organic entity."

© 1983 Walter Simonson

"The cosmic stuff gets the readers inter-

stuff I saw in my formative years. Hey, I liked the artists all of us American comic artists who came out of the Sixties liked — **Jack Kirby**, **Steve Ditko.** In addition, one of the major influences on my art — a bit more esoteric an influence for an American — was **Jim Holdaway**, an English artist. He did the first work on MODESTY BLAISE with **Peter O'Donnell**. I had seen a set of reprinted MODESTY BLAISE strips in art school, and my reaction was: "Boy, this looks great!" **Holdaway** has had a major influence on my inking, and to some degree, my drawing. Another influence was **Frank Bellamy.** His GARTH stuff I love. I think that **Bellamy** was a tremendous line man, and tremendous design man, using white space, texture and black to set up scenes. Other than that, more recent influences of the past five years, would be Europeans like **Moebius, Bilal**, and **Mezieres.**

STEVE: *Do you think there is going to be some kind of great cross-pollination of ideas between the best European and American cartoonists?*

WALT: I think it's going on right now, at least in the USA. A lot of the stuff I'm doing is influenced by a lot of Europeans' work, and I think there are a lot of other American artists who are picking up a lot from Europe. Nobody in the USA was influenced much by it until recently, because you never could get your hands on it. At least in New York, it has now become a lot easier to get. I've got a lot of material now that three years ago was practically impossible to find. A friend of mine from France was over here recently and looked at the stuff I had and said, "Your collection of French comics is bigger than mine!"

STEVE: *A few minutes ago, discussing the influence of STARSHIP TROOPERS on STAR SLAMMERS, we touched upon your interest in science-fiction. Are you still an SF fan?*

WALT: Not officially, in the sense of going to conventions and that sort of thing.

I've been to some of the conventions that mix science fiction and comics, but I don't think I've attended any official SF conventions since the 1974 World Con. But I still read science fiction and fantasy. Besides STARSHIP TROOPERS, I read a lot of **Heinlein,** mostly his middle stuff up through THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS. My wife likes the more recent novels, the ones the critics knock, so I've got her reading STARSHIP TROOPERS. I've also read a lot of fantasy. I'm a big **Tolkien** fan. When Ballantine, because of the success of **Tolkien,** came out with their Adult Fantasy series edited by **Lin Carter**, I bought and read the entire series. I really like fantasy in some ways better than science fiction. It just seems to be more my own natural inclination.

STEVE: *How much fantasy influence have you been integrating into THOR?*

WALT: Oh, a fair amount. The first caption of the first page of my first issue of THOR is: "Far beyond the fields we know, the core of an ancient galaxy explodes." The "Far beyond the fields we know" is essentially a direct, let's just say *hommage* — which sounds better than "swipe". It's a phrase that I got from **Lord Dunsany's** stories. Like "Once upon a time," "Far beyond the fields we know" evokes a time and a place that isn't here and isn't now. I used that very deliberately in a sort of prologue. What follows it in later issues really is the underlying thread that I hope will hold the stories together. So I started off in the fantasy tradition right from the first.

STEVE: *But that opening page is science fiction, as well.*

WALT: It's a mixture. It's cosmic. It's got exploding galaxies and then these giant hands come out with the giant tongs and grap ahold of a gleaming ingot. It's a

ested but soap opera brings them back."

little of everything, in that sense — fantasy *and* science fiction. One of the things I liked about THOR, when **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** were doing it — doing their best work — was the fact that it really seemed to have three theaters of operation: Earth, Asgard, and space. Thor would be off patching things up in outer space, while on Earth things were coming unglued rapidly and plots were afoot in Asgard. So, he could really kind of bounce around, and it gave the whole strip room for this larger-than-life character to operate in. It may take a while, but I hope I'm re-establishing that kind of feeling in THOR.

STEVE: *Rather than a soap opera feeling?*

WALT: Well, I certainly have plenty of soap opera I've been working in. The cosmic stuff gets the readers interested, but it's the soap opera that brings them back. By "soap opera" I mean the characters and what they're going through.

STEVE: *When you set about revitalizing THOR, what did you want to change most?*

WALT: There are a couple of characters that have been around for fifteen to twenty years who are really kind of dull, and don't serve any function. I've wanted to introduce some new blood into the book for a long time. I'm keeping around some of the older characters, but bending them out of shape. For example, what I'm doing with Balder is a lot of fun. I always thought Balder had potential, but he's always been such a second banana, always such a noble but whiny character. Like, he was never as good as Thor, or as strong, his father wasn't Odin, he couldn't pick up the hammer, he never got the girl — stuff like that. It's a tough character to make interesting. But there just seemed to be a kernel of something in him that *could* be intriguing. So, I'm going to take Balder and really make a pretzel out of him. In the first issue I did, Balder put on about thirty pounds. He will become Balder the Broad, by the time I get through with him. He and Volstagg are having eating contests. Balder is eating "to forget." Because it's a Code comic, I can't have him drinking himself to death.

STEVE: *And it might make him too much like Tony Stark.*

WALT: I hadn't even thought about that, but it's true. It's just in Balder's case he's a glutton instead of an alcoholic and that's just the beginning of the things I plan to do to him. There are alot of questions that I still have about Thor — what his character is, what I'm going to do with him, things like that. Because, after all, there's nothing wrong with Thor. He's a big handsome guy with shoulders broader than anybody, he can pick up the magic hammer that nobody else can pick up, and he can beat up anybody. He's really good-looking, he gets the girls. His dad's a king. Hey, how tough can you be? I find him a much more difficult character to get into than someone like Balder.

STEVE: *Are you going to be delving more deeply into the original Norse myths?*

WALT: I think so, both in the storyline and to a greater degree in the graphics of the strip. Everybody who's drawn THOR in the past twenty years including me has done a very **Kirby**-oid version of it, of the character, the surrounding graphics, the way Asgard looks, all that kind of stuff. **Kirby** did some wonderful work on it and really put an indelible stamp on the book. I don't plan to change all that. I'm not changing the fact that Asgard's this rock floating in space with rainbows going to it. There are underlying graphic axioms that belong in the book. At the same time, I am making Asgard, for example, less **Kirby**-oid in its appearance. I've gotten a lot of material on the Vikings, on their metal work and design motifs, all that kind of thing. I always wanted to introduce that kind of stuff into the book, to kind of rough up the gods a bit, visually.

STEVE: *And make the interiors of the halls look more like Viking halls?*

WALT: Yeah, although maybe fancier, because a lot of Viking halls were essentially these underground things covered with sod, which don't look as good as gleaming gold castles. The castle I've got Loki in is really modeled on Scandinavian church architecture, with very sloping roofs, one storey on top of the other, getting narrower and narrower as it goes up. I've stuck it on top of a big cliff because that's where castles are always found, but I'm using the Viking dragon heads on posts to mark the trail. In front of the throne he's sitting on there's a step that's got runic characters on it. It's those kind of design motifs that I want to bring into the book, because they haven't been there before. I think a lot of the stuff that Jack did originally was taken from the same source material, and then he got to where he could just do it out of his own head. Hey, I can do just as good a **Kirby**-oid Asgard as the next guy, and *did* when I was drawing the book about four or five years ago, but now I would like to do what Jack did, which is create my own images out of the original Norse culture. I've tried to rough Heimdal up so he looks a little more barbaric, a little more out of the north, with the furs and all. At the same time, I want to keep the visual super-hero vocabulary that **Jack Kirby** invented. When Thor throws a punch, his feet will still be eight feet apart on the ground. I want the power that Jack had in his art. He did it better than anybody else. In a sense, I'm taking my *carte blanche* quite literally.

STEVE: *With all your work, are you still having fun?*

WALT: Hey, if I'm not having fun, I'm not going to be in comics.

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"I've no desire to replace John Wayne's

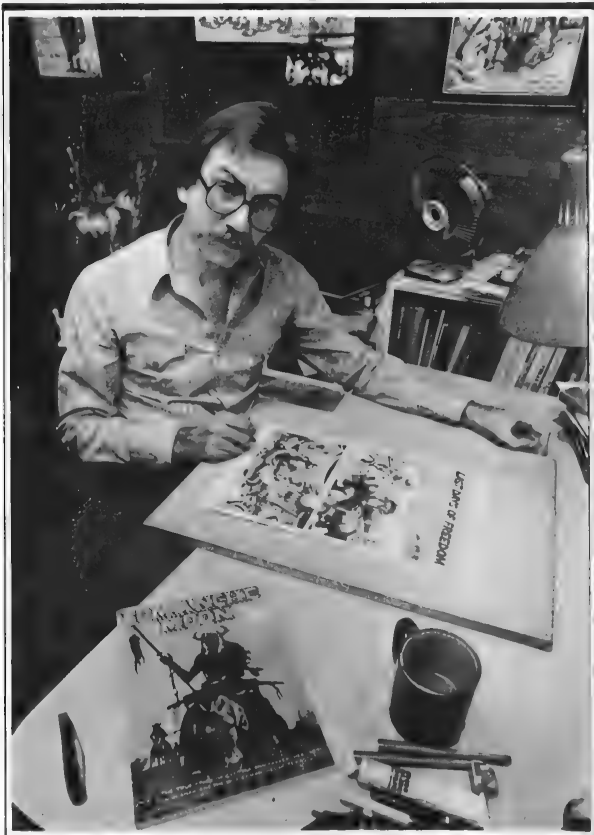

Photo: Ed Malcik

myth with my own. There's no danger of that."

JAXON

Quite, Jaxon's abilites as a writer and artist — as well as the verbal proficiency evident in this interview — have been earning him guest status at comic-book conventions. His much-praised historical "novels" demonstrate meticulous research, exciting story-telling skill, and lively, detailed artwork influenced by master frontier artists Remington and Russell.

Jaxon's GOD NOSE (circa 1964) was the first "underground" comic, according to the UNDERGROUND PRICE GUIDE. Spawned on the EC comics of the fifties, his early stories for SLOW DEATH and SKULL comix established Jaxon (Jack Jackson) as heir apparent to the TALES OF THE CRYPT legacy, as much as Richard Corben, Jeff Jones or Berni Wrightson. With his latest works, the trilogy COMANCHE MOON (a biography of Indian chief Quanah Parker) and LOS TEJANOS (a controversial retelling of the uneasy relationship between "gringo" pioneers and Mexican settlers, in the Republic of Texas), Jaxon has broadened his audience and carved a unique niche for himself in the world of graphic narrative.

— Bruce Sweeney

BRUCE SWEENEY: *Could you offer a definition of what people seem to mean when they label a comic as "underground," misnomer as that may be?*

JAXON: Since the "old days," the difference between industry and underground — u.g. — comics have been gradually eroded. Even the spelling "comix" has been pretty much pre-empted, so that now when you read the word, you can't be sure which type of books are referred to.

With the advent of Warren's 1994, the initial gains of u.g. with respect to "tits' n' ass" and "nasty talk" have passed to the industry. I would like to think that if we hadn't done it first, Warren wouldn't have had the nerve to try it. I don't think that anyone can deny that SLOW DEATH is the prototype for 1994.

Other books, like HEAVY METAL, have reflected the looser attitude spawned by the u.g.'s. Overall, this must be regarded as a healthier climate for artists and writers. Some specific stories will be flops by any standards, but in the long run some real classics will result, and they will become standards for the future, much like EC was for the '60s.

BRUCE: *Does the label "underground" bother you?*

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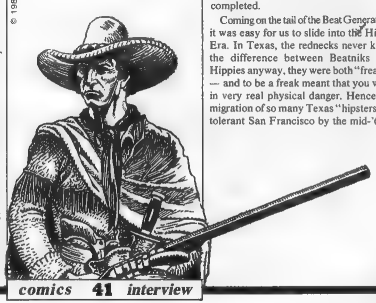

JAXON: Labels have never bothered me. What has bothered me is that great illustrators of the past did not have the degree of artistic freedom that I would have liked them to have. These freedoms we must guard and protect, regardless of the labels placed on them, because they go to the core of creativity.

BRUCE: *Being there at the beginning, you did a magazine called GOD NOSE. What inspired that? How did it end up in comic book format?*

JAXON: GOD NOSE was a real group effort. It resulted from the artistic ferment of Austin, Texas in the early '60s, the same ferment that gave the world **Janis Joplin, Chet Helms & the Family Dog, Gilbert Shelton** and the **FURRY FREAK BROTHERS,** etc.

The focus of this energy was the University of Texas's humor magazine, the RANGER, and its world-renowned beer busts that came after each issue was completed.

Coming on the tail of the Beat Generation, it was easy for us to slide into the Hippy Era. In Texas, the rednecks never knew the difference between Beatniks and Hippies anyway, they were both "freaks" — and to be a freak meant that you were in very real physical danger. Hence the migration of so many Texas "hipsters" to tolerant San Francisco by the mid-'60s.

Los Tejanos

Frontier freedom fighters in a tale as big as Texas!

written and illustrated by Jaxon

© 1983 Jack Jackson

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"Whenever anybody asks somebody else what good came out of the comics field, *Los Tejanos* is always one of the ten [comics] they bring up."
—**Bill Loebs**
Creator of *Journey*

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"Myth has always triumphed over fact."

But before we left, we left our imprint on Texas, and the brave souls that stayed behind carried it on. I did GOD NOSE in '64 and Shelton did several WONDER WARTHOG books. GOD NOSE is my own personal "dance of death" between the old Puritanic value system and the new cosmic consciouness. I was raised in the sand hills, under a hellfire and damnation variety of Baptist faith and was even groomed for becoming a preacher.

BRUCE: *Another retired Baptist, huh?*

JAXON: Yeah, really. Obviously, I had many skeletons rattling around in my closet, and GOD NOSE was the instrument of exorcism, the rites of passage that I had to go through before I could embrace any kind of expanded consciousness.

Some have called GOD NOSE the first underground comic. Designations of this kind are, of their nature, arbitrary. When I did it, I was not aware of any technical innovation. The fact that I had — with a lot of help from my friends — to sell GOD NOSE on the streets was a regretted financial necessity; that I had to privately print it was also a regretted necessity; but mainly it was all just good fun — another excuse to throw a big party. Strangely, after I had gotten rid of my demons (and stopped taking peyote) I found myself unable to do any "more NOSE tales. It was not the sort of thing that I could do at the drop of a hat.

BRUCE: *How did you become associated with the early u.g. books and publishers?*

JAXON: I got into the San Francisco underground book scene through my connections with the poster trip. I was art director for the Avalon dance posters for awhile, and sitting behind my cluttered desk, managed to meet not only all the prominent artists (**Mouse, Kelley, Griffin, Mosteoso,** etc.) but the big head-shop distributors as well. One of these, the Print Mint, was the first to shift emphasis from posters to comix, and they handled privately-published books by **Crumb, Shelton,** and myself.

BRUCE: *COMANCHE MOON is one of the finest books from an underground artist. What inspired it?*

JAXON: I've always been a history nut. I've always been interested in "cowboys

© 1979 Jack Jackson

"Self-censorship grates on my nerves some-

and Indians" — hard to avoid, growing up in Texas.

But what really got me interested in **Quanah Parker** and the Comanches was a series of 28 large pen drawings of famous Indian leaders (1600 - 1900) done for a coloring book published in San Francisco. These drawings were to have appeared with a facing page of text, done by Mr. **Dockstader** of the Museum of the American Indian, but the deal fell through. Anyone interested in doing this book? I've written the text myself.

Anyway, my interest in Indians was aroused by the project, and I managed to fit a tale, "Nits make Lice," — about the Sand Creek Massacre — into SLOW DEATH #7 as a result of my research. It was a bummer, a real depressing strip, and I realized that I couldn't keep doing this kind of downer work. So I looked for a more uplifting example of the contact between the two races, and **Quanah Parker** was a natural. Here he was, a "half-breed" at a time when it carried the worst possible connotations and yet he managed to rise above it, to make a genuine contribution to his times and to the human race. I was suspicious — how could anyone pull it off as well as he did? — so I searched closely for flaws, for pay-offs and double-dealing, but amazingly enough, I couldn't find any. Apparently the man was true to himself, his people and truly made the best of a bad situation.

BRUCE: *Could you give us any idea of how long you worked on COMANCHE MOON?*

JAXON: I spent over three years working

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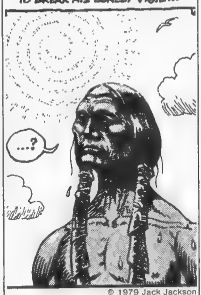

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on the entire project and enjoyed it immensely. If my readers get half the "hit" that I got off it, I'll be satisified.

I wanted the book to demonstrate the wide range of possibilities of the "comic" medium. To me, the medium is tops. It can make you laugh and it can make you cry, feel guilt and pride — the whole spectrum of human emotion. You get out of it what you put into it. It can be quick and dirty, or it can be a finely wrought educational tool that gives us insight into the human predicament. The result is the measure of the artist's commitment to himself and his readers.

Personally, I like the term "illustrated book" for something like LOS TEJANOS or COMANCHE MOON, but labels are useless anyway. I'm content for it to be just a plain "comic book."

BRUCE: *Are any of the pages renderings of existing paintings?*

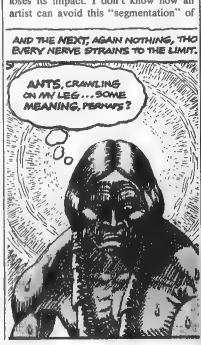
JAXON: Yes, a lot of my panels were stolen or lifted directly from existing work of other artists. I cheat a lot, as do most other artists. Sometimes this "swipe file" is deftly concealed, or the sources are too esoteric to be noticed, but I'll wager that most "great" artists do it at one time or another — from **Frazetta** right down to the lowliest. Not that it's anything to brag about, but it happens all the time and I figure you might as well be honest about it.

The trained eye will be able to pick a lot of **Charles Russell, Frederic Remington,** etc., out of COMANCHE MOON and LOS TEJANOS. After all, there ain't that many buffalo or wild Indians running around anymore to draw from life. I figure that if you're going to swipe, might as well do it from the best, and I usually leave enough of my source intact so that there'll be no question about it. This sort of thing has been going on since the caveman paintings. It ain't new.

BRUCE: *I thought I had seen a lot of Remington in MOON! How did you initially conceptualize the COMMANCHE MOON — as 3 separate books?*

JAXON: When I set about to do something like COMANCHE MOON or the LOS TEJANOS series about the Texas-Mexicans, I always have at least an outline in my head for the complete project. This is why the individual books don't particularly stand up well on their own — they're really just a part of the whole story, broken up arbitrarily into 24, 32, or 48 page segments. This, unfortunately, is necessary for an artist to sustain him/herself during the lengthy time that it takes to finish an "epic". It's hard to get a publisher to pay for a long, strung-out trip, and how else do you survive for three years unless you can get money, book by book? I was particularly conscious of the "weakness" of my second book of the COMANCHE trilogy, but it's really an essential chapter of the final result.

By the same token, RECUERDEN EL ALAMO (Remember the Alamo) is much stronger now that TEJANO EXILE is released. It's a case of the first setting the stage for the whammy of the second. Unless you know the beginning, the end loses its impact. I don't know how an artist can avoid this "segmentation" of



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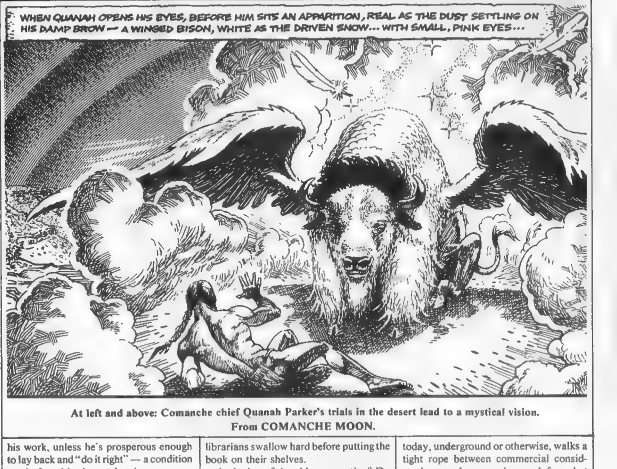
times and I miss letting it all hang out."


WHEN QUANAH OPENS HIS EYES, BEFORE HIM SITS AN APPARITION, REAL AS THE DUST SETTLING ON HIS DAMP BROW — A WINGED BISON, WHITE AS THE DRIVEN SNOW... WITH SMALL, PINK EYES...
© 1979 Jack Jackson

At left and above: Comanche chief Quanah Parker's trials in the desert lead to a mystical vision. From COMANCHE MOON.

his work, unless he's prosperous enough to lay back and "do it right" — a condition rarely found in the marketplace.

BRUCE: *Do you see a similar outcome for the Texas-Mexican series?*

JAXON: I wanted to experiment with the formula set forth in COMANCHE MOON in the Tejano "epic". I liked the photo section, and think that this type of "reality link" to the graphic story strengthens reader identification.

BRUCE: *There's a thin line that you're treading here. On one hand a valid historical piece is less "flamboyant" than what is common to the u.g.'s, yet COMANCHE MOON and LOS TEJANOS have a lot more sparkle and gutsiness than what's common in the history books.*

JAXON: It is true that historical-type sagas like I've been delving into require a measure of self-censorship. This grates on my nerves sometimes and I miss letting it all hang out. It's more of a rigid discipline trip and only time will tell if it's worth it. Maybe I've mellowed too much. The truth is that I want this work to be "accessible" to a wide audience, to give young readers something real to put their teeth into — not so real that high school librarians swallow hard before putting the book on their shelves.

And what of the older generation? Do we "avant-garde" artists exclude them from the human race? Why not give them something that they can sink their gums into? My experience has been that they love to see us youngsters telling a yarn right for a change, even though they complain that the print is too small. A lot of elderly, matronly types looked at my depiction of **Quanah Parker's** mother slashing her naked breasts, and it didn't faze them because they knew that it really happened that way in real life.

The key seems to be artistic *restraint*, not self-censorship or total disregard for people's sensitivity. If the reader understands that license is necessary to what you're trying to get across, they'll usually give you the benefit of the doubt. You can't underestimate the intelligence of your readers.

BRUCE: *There are a lot of younger artists coming into the undergrounds and elsewhere today who don't get exposed to observations like yours, Jaxon. Is there any quick shot that you'd toss out to them for consideration?*

JAXON: Well, I suppose. The artist today, underground or otherwise, walks a tight rope between commercial considerations and personal regard for what they do. It's kind of like **Dr. John** phrased it, "walk on gilded splinters." Too much commercialization and they become prostitutes and lose respect for their work; too much freedom and they starve to death or have to take menial jobs to support their "death to the oppressor" stance. The fact remains that the comics medium is a viable vehicle. Buying gas for the trip will always be a problem, not to mention roadmaps along the way, but it's still a vehicle that artists can drive to get just about anywhere they want to go.

Myself, I'll keep plugging along with whatever grabs my fancy just as long as somebody out there will buy it. I really appreciate the people who take the time to sit down and write me what they think of the direction that I'm going in. It helps a lot, working in isolation, to know what my readers think, and I value people's comments highly — even when I don't agree with them.

BRUCE: *Texas sounds pretty disagreeable back in the "good ol' days" for artists. Has it changed dramatically since then? I guess I wonder why you're there . . .*

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"A couple of my kin died at the Alamo."

JAXON: Texas has softened somewhat, but the recent invasion of "foreigners" fleeing the congested north has created a redneck backlash of sorts. People aren't as friendly as they used to be. But in terms of a publishing scene, it's still nowhere. Even though my recent stuff has become increasingly provincial, I still can't even get a nibble when it comes to finding a Texas-based publisher.

I came back to Texas because my roots are here and I was lonesome, not because it's particularly improved over GOD NOSE days. In many ways, it's worse.

BRUCE: *What's the local reaction to these books likely to be like?*

JAXON: I expect some antagonism because for many Texans, the war with Mexico never ended. You can catch a glimpse of this at any bordertown brothel —swaggering Anglos still putting it to the "conquered race." On a more realistic side, the rising strength of the Chicanos all over the old Spanish Southwest threatens many Anglos.

It is hard to see how any sympathetic treatment of a controversial historical figure like **Juan Seguin** could escape an emotional response from both sides.

Remember that **Seguin** was considered a traitor by both Texas and Mexico. He, like many other former Mexican citizens after the Mexican War, was caught in the middle, and by trying to relate to both sides, lost the confidence of both.

This crisis of being caught between two worlds still applies to many modern Mexican-Americans. This is, to me, why **Seguin's** story, as the first to deal with this problem, has modern implications that reach far beyond the borders of Texas. But because of his unique personality, it is a story that strikes at and contradicts the official "party line" of both modern factions — the Chicano and the "traditional" Anglo. Neither side will be comfortable with the truth.

BRUCE: *What are some of your observations of the current state of the art insofar as it pertains to undergrounds?*

JAXON: I don't see a whole lot of great new stuff in the undergrounds. Frankly, I'm bored with dope comix. After **Rand Holmes** and **Gilbert Shelton,** what can you say? The problem is, as always, finding someone who can both draw and have something interesting to say. This is not a put-down of just the undergrounds. Thumbing through slick publications like HEAVY METAL will reveal the same problem.

BRUCE: *Who else do you find provocative?*

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Above: Panel from LOS TEJANOS. Below: Jaxon's artistic influence — Frederic Ray. From THE STORY OF THE ALAMO.

JAXON: About the only personal inspiration I get these days is from work of people like **Redondo, Alcala, Nino, Nebres,** etc., and this is because I love their ornate inking styles, figure drawing, epic dramatizations, etc. I consider **Alcala's** work on the CONAN saga to be in the best tradition of the great "comic" illustrators like **Pyle, Foster, Raymond,** etc. I like the new life that the French artists who pioneered METAL HURLANT put into sci-fi and fantasy illustration.

BRUCE: *Do you find u.g.s to be softer or having less clout than 10 years ago?*

JAXON: I wouldn't say that the undergrounds have "lost their clout." They broke some important ground in their early days. The question is, how long can you get bountiful crops out of the same piece of ground? Ideas restated aren't usually as powerful or exciting as the first time around. We get "ho-hum" about it. The younger cartoonists, ideally, should try to stake out some new boundaries for

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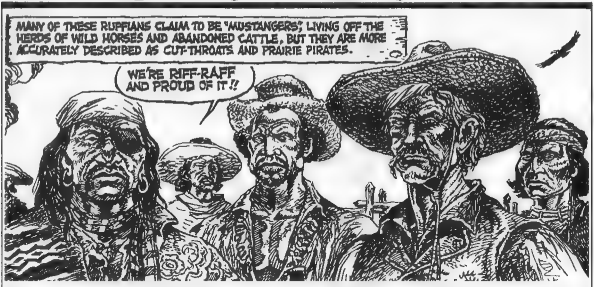
"To me, picking something to die for is


MANY OF THESE RUFFIANS CLAIM TO BE 'MUSTANGERS', LIVING OFF THE HERDS OF WILD HORSES AND ABANDONED CATTLE, BUT THEY ARE MORE ACCURATELY DESCRIBED AS CUT-THROATS AND PRAIRIE PIRATES..
WE'RE RIFF-RAFF AND PROUD OF IT!!

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themselves. Imitating **S. Clay Wilson** isn't going to cut it.

People seem to expect new revelations every day. They want new talent to appear overnight instead of realizing that these things take years. If comix can simply survive the end of the cult era that spawned it, it will be amazing. Most vestiges of Hippiedom have not. This is a transitional stage for u.g.s as it is for many other aspects of '60s culture. To the extent that comix continue to reflect changing attitudes, interest, etc., they will still be with us.

BRUCE: *What titles have you found to be the most significant recently?*

JAXON: To be honest, there are a lot of comix that I don't read anymore. On the other hand, I don't read any regular comics.

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After years of faithfully buying CONAN, I finally quit. Where are the SWAMP THINGs, the RIMAs, TARZANs, JONAH HEXes, etc., of yesteryear? It's all debris in the wake of STAR WARS. I mildly enjoyed STAR WARS but I fear that it has sunk legitimate Science Fiction/Fantasy in triviality. Hell, **Al Williamson** and **Wally Wood** did neat technological gadgetry for EC, but it was all for mood and setting, never an end in itself. Nowadays, people seem to think that the special effects are the meat rather than just the bones.

If I was a pessimist, I'd almost think that we've exhausted all the possibilities, spun all the plots, and that's why seemingly everything we get these days is idiot-level, whiz-bang special effects that pass for substance. I tend to see myself, however, as a guarded optimist, and so have faith that the computerized cycle will focus back on the basic human condition, rather than on its toys.

BRUCE: *To a degree, then, COMANCHE MOON is a rescrutiny of the roots– an analysis of human behavior without the trappings of current technology.*

JAXON: COMANCHE MOON represents a personal turning away from "asphalt promises," in a sense. It's a return to the timeless human struggle. Critics will say that I have simply substituted feathers and bead work for gleaming chrome. I do think, however, that this book has some meat to go on the bones, besides the "special effects."

I don't know how it's selling. Probably slowly. I don't mind, though, because I tried to make it something that people will enjoy through the coming years. Naturally, sales concern me, because I want to do more projects along these lines and if it

one of the most personal of choices."

doesn't move along, it'll affect my ability to find publishers for new stuff. Volkserlag is bringing out a German edition, and a French version is in the works. I just hope that folks at home will buy it.

BRUCE: *Sometimes it seems that the Europeans are more fascinated by our roots than we are; look how popular LT. BLUEBERRY is over there. In many quarters, we ignore some of our own best stuff only to have it rediscovered by the Europeans. Jimi Hendrix, an American, had to get started in England.*

JAXON: So did **Clint Eastwood** and **Charles Bronson.** Currently, I'm really excited about my Tejano series. **Juan Seguin** is almost as heroic a character as **Quanah Parker,** and the story of the Tejanos is equally as interesting. Unfortunately, LOS TEJANOS is a story charged with emotional contemporary impact, because of the large number of Spanish-speaking people within the United States. This is something of a headache — interpreting the past to modern outlooks and prejudices — but it also is more of a challenge. I'm trying to present the story objectively, but it's bound to step on someone's toes. The bookstore at the Alamo returned the copy that I gave them of book #1 without comment. If this relatively tame treatment was too much for them, wait until they see book #2, TEJANO EXILE!

BRUCE: *What are some of the current projects that you're involved in?*

JAXON: I've just finished writing LOS MESTENOS, a mammoth history of ranching in Texas during the 18th century. *A mesteno* was a wild unbranded animal from which our word "mustang" is derived. I thought that I'd put my research together on this subject, so I've devoted the past year to it. The funny part is that I did all this research to write a novel which I had in near finished form, before I tackled the scholarly study. Since the great **James Michener** has recently decided to come to Texas and write *the* Epic Texan novel, my book — all 900 pages of it — will keep me warm this winter, page by page in the fireplace. After **Michener** has his say on the topic of what makes Texas tick — TV miniseries and all — trying to get my book published would be like some little Hawaiian showing his manuscript around New York City just after **Michener** had addressed the subject, in his novel, HAWAII. Now I'm thinking of taking my novel and adapting it to an 18th century Spanish time-warp adventure strip — sort of a **Sabatini** thing with cosmic time-warp elements and lots of big-breasted women.

BRUCE: *Juan Seguin, the central character in LOS TEJANOS, is a noticeably complex character, in that he's sort of a man on two sides of the border, and maybe something in between.*

JAXON: Yes, we touched on that earlier — especially the fact that neither side has historically viewed him as a heroic figure. Now with **Quanah Parker,** ironically, it's just the opposite. Everybody thinks he's wonderful. This is possible because the Comanches aren't perceived as a threat anymore, whereas many people are freaking out over all the Mexicans streaming over the border. None of this ethnocentrism means shit to me, and a couple of my kinfolks, **Tom Jackson** and **Buck Trammell,** died at the Alamo. To me, picking something to die for is one of the most personal of choices: it doesn't mean that I can't see the other fellow's side of the struggle, or that I have to bullshit myself into believing that I'm "right" and he's "wrong". One reason I was attracted to **Seguin's** story is because it defies a simplistic approach.

BRUCE: *Clearly your book gives us a very different perspective of the Alamo than the standard John Wayne presentation.*

JAXON: I have no desire to replace **John Wayne's** myth with my own. Fortunately, there's no danger of that: myth always triumphs over fact. That's why nuclear energy is so scary; we've used the logical part of our brain to create something that the mythical part can't manage. What was it that Alfred E. Neuman used to say?

BRUCE: *Anything else you'd like to add?*

JAXON: Yes. I think COMANCHE MOON and **Shelton's** slick, full-color THOROUGHLY RIPPED, show that "underground" artists do have available formats to rival the well-heeled, soft-cover book publishers. It is to be hoped that fandom will support them.

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"Like a Renaissance artist, cartoonists should be able to do anything."

Joe Kubert has been in comics longer than almost anyone, has worked in every genre in the field, and has filled many roles — artist (HAWKMAN, TARZAN, SGT. ROCK and the unforgettable ENEMY ACE), editor (ARION and SGT. ROCK), and even writer (most recently, THE REDEEMER, of which he is also artist and creator).

As if all that weren't enough, he's also taken on another career — educator. The Joe Kubert School of Comics Art is already a respected institution in the industry. (For a student's-eye-view of the school, see our interview with artist Tod Smith in COMICS INTERVIEW #7.)

Joe came up for air from his staggeringly busy schedule to talk with Jim Salicrup about life as a grandmaster of comics art. The two met in Joe's office at DC Comics, high above bustling Fifth Avenue. In a gravelly-but-gentle voice with a touch of a Brooklyn accent, Joe speaks just the way one might imagine Sgt. Rock himself to sound.

As the combat-happy "Joes" of Easy Company might say, Kubert covered a very broad field of fire . . .

KUBERT

Photo: Jim Salicrup

"The popularity of the superhero is

Above and right: Kubert/Redondo art for the DC special, STORIES FROM THE BIBLE.

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JIM SALICRUP: *I've heard that you started in comics at an incredibly young age.*

JOE KUBERT: I was 11 years old.

JIM: *Then you actually were a comic professional before you even started high school, right?*

JOE: I was still going to junior high school in East Flatbush, in Brooklyn. One of the guys I was going to school with, a kid I used to play ball with, had a relative who owned MLJ, the company that's Archie Comics today. I had been doing cartoon-type drawing since the time I could hold a pencil in my hand, and this friend of mine had seen work that I'd been doing and suggested that I go up and see his relative at MLJ. This sounded absolutely fascinating to me. So I did a couple of drawings, got on the subway, and went to the MLJ office, which at that time was down on Canal Street in lower Manhattan.

JIM: *What was it like, a kid from Brooklyn, 10 or 11 years old, going to the Big City to break into comics?*

JOE: I couldn't begin to tell you how exciting it was for me. I can still remember the smell of the MLJ office. *(Laughter.)* Not that it stunk, but it had a heady aroma, a combination of ink and paper and pencils. It smelled like a comic-book house is supposed to smell. It held that kind of excitement to me.

JIM: *How did the people there treat you?*

JOE: They were very kind. They looked at my sketches and suggested a couple of corrections. I did them and came back the next week.

JIM: *Who was there at that time?*

JOE: **Mort Meskin** was working there. Also **Harry Shorten,** as a writer. **Irv Novick** was one of the first people I ever met. He gave me my first drawing lesson, showing me how to draw the German duck-billed helmet correctly. The war wasn't even on then — just the Germans getting more and more powerful. In the next couple of weeks I met **Bob Montana.** In fact, when I first started out as a pro, I inked some of the first ARCHIE strips, when Bob first started pencilling it. **Bob Montana** was Archie, really. He was the kind of guy who lived the things he wrote about and drew.

JIM: *When you were inking ARCHIE, it wasn't the same style as the one you've evolved now, was it?*

JOE: No, but it was similar. There's really been very little change. I think my style was a little bit more detailed and a little bit more realistic than it is today.

JIM: *When did you decide you wanted to make your living drawing comic books?*

JOE: The first day I was up at MLJ.

JIM: *What was the reaction of your family?*

JOE: My family came from the other side. They were immigrants. The idea of anybody making a living doing these crazy little drawings was probably the farthest thing removed from their minds. But my parents were extremely understanding, and it's a result of that that I'm in this business to this day. Because despite the fact that my parents never figured that I'd be able to make a living at this, just seeing that I was so involved and interested in it, and that I wanted to do this more than anything else, was enough for them to say, "Well, go ahead."

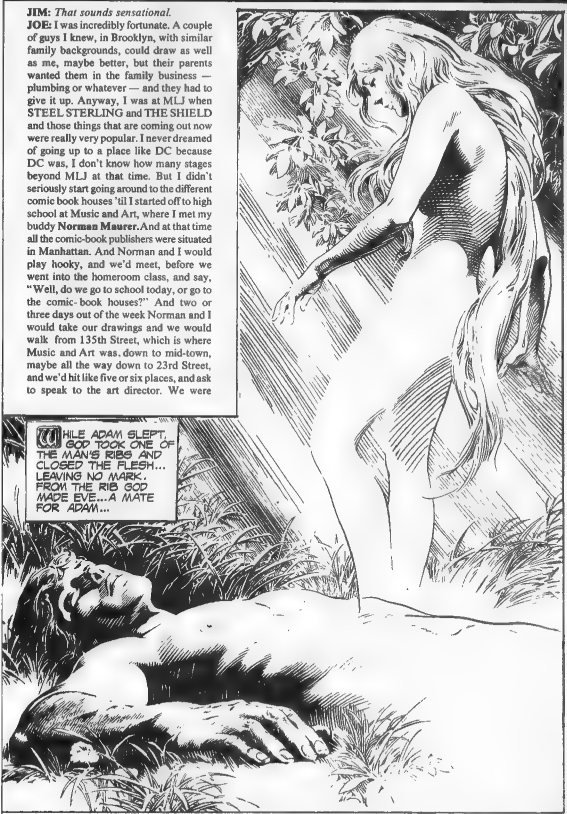
VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Joe Kubert
Born: September 1926
Residence: Dover, New Jersey
Occupation: Artist, writer, editor, educator.
Training: Largely self-taught, with assistance from Irv Novick and other professionals. Also attended Music and Art High School in New York City.
Credits: SGT. ROCK, ENEMY ACE, THE GREEN BERETS (syndicated strip), HAWKMAN, TARZAN and countless others.
Pet Peeve: Newspaper syndicates' current unwillingness to run any new comic strips other than humorous ones.

limiting the diversity of artistic styles."

JIM: *That sounds sensational.*

JOE: I was incredibly fortunate. A couple of guys I knew, in Brooklyn, with similar family backgrounds, could draw as well as me, maybe better, but their parents wanted them in the family business — plumbing or whatever — and they had to give it up. Anyway, I was at MLJ when STEEL STERLING and THE SHIELD and those things that are coming out now were really very popular. I never dreamed of going up to a place like DC because DC was, I don't know how many stages beyond MLJ at that time. But I didn't seriously start going around to the different comic book houses 'til I started off to high school at Music and Art, where I met my buddy **Norman Maurer.** And at that time all the comic-book publishers were situated in Manhattan. And Norman and I would play hooky, and we'd meet, before we went into the homeroom class, and say, "Well, do we go to school today, or go to the comic-book houses?" And two or three days out of the week Norman and I would take our drawings and we would walk from 135th Street, which is where Music and Art was, down to mid-town, maybe all the way down to 23rd Street, and we'd hit like five or six places, and ask to speak to the art director. We were



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"Bob Kanigher is one of the best writers

perhaps 11 or 12 at the time and would make ourselves as pestiferous and obnoxious as we could. *(Laughter.)* But everyone was extremely kind to us.

JIM: *So were you doing most of your work at that time at home?*

JOE: Oh, sure, while I was still going to high school. My first strip that I ever sold was called BOLTON, for CAT-MAN COMICS, and I must have been 11½ at the time. And they were nice enough to pay me five bucks a page for my stuff.

JIM: *When you got out of high school, what did you do?*

JOE: Well, by the time I got out of high school, I had started doing HAWKMAN and THE FLASH. **Shel Mayer,** who was the editor of those books before they both became part of the Detective Comics group, was the one who gave me my first chance to do covers, and I did HAWKMAN covers for him. I was doing that in my second, third and fourth years of high school.

JIM: *Well, how did you make the transition from high school to becoming a full-time comic-book artist?*

JOE: It wasn't difficult at all. Those were

really enjoyable days. There were a bunch of guys at that time — that's when I met **Carmine Infantino** and **Frank Giacoia** and **Shel Mayer** and all the guys. I started out inking **Mort Meskin's** VIGILANTE and **Jack Kirby's** NEWSBOY LEGION and THE GUARDIANS. There was so much work to be had, you were hired only partially on the basis of quality. They needed a lot of art. There were 64 pages of material that had to be turned out in a 10-cent magazine. And the opportunities were there for anybody to slip in 5 or 10 pages. The art directors figured, "Heck, I have 60 or 50 pages to counterbalance whatever crap I might buy from this kid." *(Laughter.)* That gave an opportunity for me and a lot of other guys to have our stuff published. And of course that's critical. Because you can look at an original sketch, but you can't gauge what a guy's work is really like, as you well know, until you see it published — until you see what happens in reproduction and reduction and what color is put on it, and when it's printed on newsprint as opposed to coated stock or whatever.

JIM: *Did you find that you were learning more working in comics, or studying at Music and Art?*

JOE: Oh, Music and Art gave me a good background in basic art and drawing, composition and color and so forth, but for cartooning, no, I got my education in comics working in the comic book field itself, no doubt about it. Just as **Harvey**

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On this page and next two pages: Tarzan, as drawn by Kubert.

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Kurtzman who attended Music and Art got his education, and **Will Elder** and **Al Feldstein** who also went to Music and Art got theirs. They were a close-knit bunch of people, and very avid as far as the comic-book medium was concerned. I guess that's reflected in today's profession.

JIM: *Well, when I was going to Art and Design, I remember hearing a lot about that school. I had some cartooning classes, and I remember being very frustrated because I was learning so much more working at Marvel the same time. Besides that, Marvel was paying me money.*

JOE: That helps. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *And at Art and Design I felt there were a few really good teachers, but on the whole, many of them seemed bored and uninterested. One of the teachers in the cartooning class was going to tell us how to do comic books, and it was obvious that he'd never seen a comic book.* (Laughter.) *Go through all the same steps, and if anyone tried to learn comics from him they would have been in trouble. But I had very supportive parents also and I told them, I'd just as soon work for Marvel than graduate from Art and Design. And they said, "Go ahead!" So I'm one of those high school dropouts.*

JOE: My parents would have never allowed that. They would have beaten me to a pulp.

JIM: *But, getting back to you. Were you doing a lot of freelance?*

JOE: I've been freelance 99% of my entire career. The only time I've worked under contract was just recently with DC now. That's my choice and selection. I felt that given the plans I had, that that would be best. Also when I was doing the GREEN BERETS strip, that was on a contract as well. But prior to that it's been always freelance work. When I got out of high school, it was a matter of just setting myself up to do what I wanted to do. I don't think that I've been unemployed for one day in the past 45 years that I've been in the business — including one time when I was in the Army.

JIM: *Didn't you publish your own work — 3D stuff — in the Fifties?*

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"The newcomers shouldn't be so limited."

JOE: I got out of the Army in 1952, and while I was stationed in Germany, I had seen some three-dimensional magazines — magazines that contained 3D photographs, not illustrations — with the red-and-green glasses. And when I came back, one of the first things my wife and I did — I had gotten married before going overseas — we took a vacation and went out to California. The guy I wanted to see out there was **Norman Maurer** because he had taken up residence permanently out there, having married the daughter of **Moe Howard.** I had been out there for their wedding, as a matter of fact, in 1948.

I had driven out there from New Jersey with **Irwin Hasen,** who was later the artist for DONDI, in my car, a Town and Country Chrysler, a convertible, the top of which we never put up the whole time. Irwin did not drive, so I had driven the whole way and Irwin was my navigator.

Anyhow getting back to 1952, my wife and I took our first vacation in California. I had made contact and had a relationship on-going with St. John Publishing Company, prior to having gone into the Army, and St. John evidenced an interest in a collaboration where we would be producing comics as co-publishers. I had come up with the idea for TOR in 1950 on the troop ship heading out for Europe.

JIM: *So what did you do on your 1952 vacation in California?*

JOE: Norman and I were shooting the breeze, and Norman seemed more interested in getting back into comics than what he was doing at the time. He had become the agent for the **Three Stooges.** And I told Norman that if I could set something up that seemed reasonable and equitable and interesting to him would he be interested in coming into a deal that I was hoping to set up with St. John. Norman said that he wanted to put out a THREE STOOGES comic book. When I got back from California and told these things to St. John, they said, "Great, let's go with it." I contacted Norman and Norman came out with his wife. At that time he didn't have any children; he left a house in California, and rented a house at Lake Hopatcong in New Jersey, which is not far from where I lived at the time. And we started publishing TOR and THREE STOOGES and one or two other books at the time, with the St. John Publishing Company.

JIM: *Were you working out of a studio or at home?*

JOE: We had offices in New York, and we would go into the city. At that time we were looking for something new in comics. The competition was pretty heavy. It was about 1953, and we were looking for some really novel idea to push our books ahead. It was at that time that I remembered the 3-D stuff that I had seen in the Army. I said to Norman, "Look, do you think there's any possibility that we could do what I saw in these magazines?" In an illustrated form, as opposed to photographs. At first Norman said that he didn't think it was possible, but after we kind of chewed it around a little bit we felt that it might be feasible. And he and I and his brother Lenny — who I think had more technical knowledge than either

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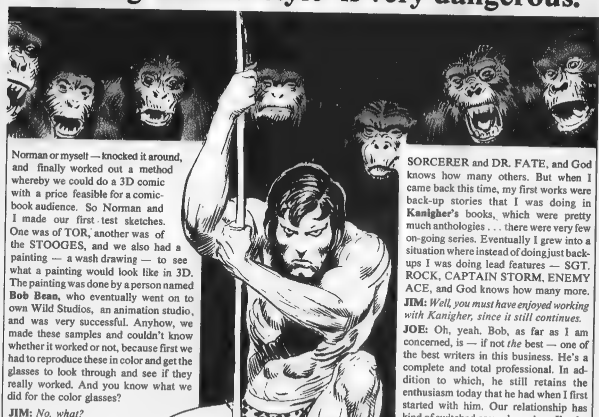
"Working 'Marvel style' is very dangerous."



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Norman or myself — knocked it around, and finally worked out a method whereby we could do a 3D comic with a price feasible for a comic-book audience. So Norman and I made our first test sketches. One was of TOR, another was of the STOOGES, and we also had a painting — a wash drawing — to see what a painting would look like in 3D. The painting was done by a person named **Bob Bean**, who eventually went on to own Wild Studios, an animation studio, and was very successful. Anyhow, we made these samples and couldn't know whether it worked or not, because first we had to reproduce these in color and get the glasses to look through and see if they really worked. And you know what we did for the color glasses?

JIM: *No, what?*

JOE: Well, at one time lollipops used to be sold with plastic color cellophane. *(Laughter.)* That's right, that's what we used to make our first test 3D glasses. We went to an engraver with the pictures, had shots made, set them up the way we felt it should be set up, and made the glasses out of these cellophanes from the lollipops. And the damn thing worked. So that was how we published the 3D comics, along with TOR, THREE STOOGES, and a whole bunch of other things.

JIM: *I think Norman's story was that the publisher liked the idea so much that he wanted to come out with dozens of 3D comics.*

JOE: That's exactly what happened. It happens over and over again in our business — the moment the publishers find a *genre* that seems to click, instead of looking for something new, they'll glut the market with similar types of things until there are so many similar books around that the poor audience doesn't know how the hell to discriminate between them. And then everything goes down the drain. Our first 3D comic had a print-run of over two million copies — better than 99% of which sold. That was then an unheard-of figure. And our price was twenty-five cents a copy, where everyone else was selling for ten cents. It was phenomenal. And of course what happened is what Norman said — they glutted the market, and from a 99% sales, the sales bottomed out at 8%, which was a terrible shellacking — one of the reasons that 3D is still anathema to a lot of the publishers today.

JIM: *Well, after St. John, did you free-lance for other companies?*

JOE: After the 3D debacle, St. John went down the drain. I went on to DC, and from that point on I was working with **Bob Kanigher,** who eventually came up with SGT.ROCK.

JIM: *What type of material were you doing first for DC?*

JOE: Well, I had worked for DC before I went into the Army. I was inking, as I mentioned before. I did SARGON THE SORCERER and DR. FATE, and God knows how many others. But when I came back this time, my first works were back-up stories that I was doing in **Kanigher's** books, which were pretty much anthologies . . . there were very few on-going series. Eventually I grew into a situation where instead of doing just back-ups I was doing lead features — SGT. ROCK, CAPTAIN STORM, ENEMY ACE, and God knows how many more.

JIM: *Well, you must have enjoyed working with Kanigher, since it still continues.*

JOE: Oh, yeah. Bob, as far as I am concerned, is — if not *the* best — one of the best writers in this business. He's a complete and total professional. In addition to which, he still retains the enthusiasm today that he had when I first started with him. Our relationship has kind of switched around — where I'm the editor now and he's writing for me. Actually, I can't say writing *for* me, he's writing *with* me. It's really a collaborative effort. We'll be able to sit down and have a plotting session which invariably works out where we're starting from scratch — ground zero — and we'll toss a couple of words out or a couple of ideas at each other, and enthusiasm and excitement will be generated from there.

Sometimes the ideas will start out with a single picture. Bob might say something like, "Sgt. Rock is carrying a dead child through a town where each window has a rifle or machine-gun sticking out from it." And by the time we come up with the story we may have thrown that initial idea out, but at least it gives us a starting point. I might say, "Bob, that's been done a thousand-and-one times. Let's see how we can twist it around." Or he'll come in and say, "We haven't done a story with a winter setting," and that might engender an idea — and we'll just bat the thing back and forth. I have a tremendous amount of respect for his ideas and the way he's able to lace things together, and I think that after the years we've been working together, he has acquired a certain amount of respect for my editorial capacity. After all these years we're probably able to work tighter and better than we ever have before.

"The artist has to respect the writer."

JIM: *When you were working for him as an artist, did you get a full script, or were you involved in the plotting?*

JOE: What I would get from him, when I was working as the artist, would be a full script. Once in a while he would ask for a suggestion, maybe an idea for a story, but that was very rare. At that time, there was a definite separation between the guy who wrote and a guy who drew and a guy who letters and the guy who colors and the guy who edits. Very rarely would there be an amalgam of all these creative efforts, as goes on today.

JIM: *Do you think that's good or bad?*

JOE: There has to be a head honcho, so to speak. As you know — you're an editor — you're the one who's gotta say, "OK, we'll use this and we'll go this way," or "Maybe we should do it this way." The final decision must be the editor's, because the final responsibility is the editor's. But you, as an editor, want as much input as possible from everyone who's involved. You want everybody to feel free to contribute as much as they possibly can. And invariably that results in a better job, all the way around. The people are more involved with what they're doing. They feel a part of what they're doing, and rightfully so. They should.

JIM: *Well, you try to get the best you can from everybody.*

JOE: That's right. But the kind of separation of functions that was extant at the time that Bob was editing the books was pretty much Standard Operational Procedure. Which doesn't hold true any more.

JIM: *Well, on the stories being done now, after you work out a plot, you then proceed to work out the script?*

JOE: We work out a complete and total script. I know that Marvel works quite differently, where the writer will do a synopsis, perhaps a paragraph per page with some general idea as to how the story should be paced. I think there are a few people who do very well working that way. But in the main, especially with people who are just beginning, I think it is very, very dangerous.

JIM: *Well, I think that working "Marvel Style" has changed. There are tighter plots that are almost full scripts. I've worked at Marvel a long time, and ninety percent of what I've* written's *been full scripts. It depends upon the different projects, and the artists. Some artists request a full script. Others feel restricted by it.*

JOE: I just don't like the pacing of the story to be determined *after* I finish my drawings. I would rather have a tight, complete idea of what the storyline, characterization, and everything should be, and then I want to adhere to that story. I think that the artist has to have a respect for the writer and not to get the bit in his teeth, which happens a lot of times, and go off on a complete tangent. What I want to do as an artist is to try to enhance the story, bringing out the most effective part of what that story is about.

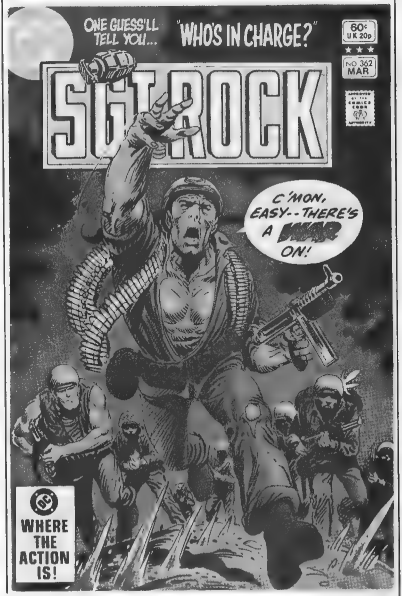
JIM: *I think "Marvel style" evolved from Stan Lee working with artists who were very strong plotters themselves.*

JOE: I'm sure **Jack Kirby** worked that way.

JIM: *In essence, what the artists were getting was just a premise or maybe a rough storyline — and they would develop it themselves, and leave notes — almost like a rough, raw first draft of a script written by the artists themselves. The writer had to work it into a finished script. Now, the worst that can happen with that system is when a penciller who may not have a good storytelling ability or plotting sense treats the plot almost as if it were a finished script. You'll get artwork back that is more or less an illustrated rough-plot —*

JOE: Right.

JIM: *— and the writer will complain, and try to make up for the art by writing too much copy to explain the art. So it really just depends on the people. With the right artist and writer it can work out.*



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"My school is going to be an elite place."

But getting back to SGT. ROCK . . . after Kanigher does a full script and brings it back to you, do you do rough layouts, then?

JOE: No, I don't do rough layouts. I did at one time, at the very beginning. But even my rough layouts were pretty tight — true, they were on 8½" x 11" typewriter paper, but you could almost Xerox them up to full size, use them for pencils, and somebody could ink right on top of them. No, what I do now is — and this is true also in the case of **Paul Kupperberg** who is now writing ARION for me, with **Jan Duursema** penciling — when **Kanigher** brings me the script he's written, I will edit the entire script. I will try to tighten it, and refine it so there are no loose ends when the artist gets it. When I read it, if I sense there's going to be a problem in, say, the dialogue, or perhaps more space should have been given to a particular illustration, I'll try to work that into my editing. SGT. ROCK is much more difficult to edit simply because the artwork is done out of the country by **Frank Redondo**, and when that strip comes back, with the artwork done, there's very little that I can do about it. And because of that, sometimes we get some stuff that is outstandingly well done, and once in a while we'll get stuff that just sort of makes me twist and turn. *(Laughter.)* It just doesn't work at all.

JIM: *Well, does Redondo send it back completely inked and lettered —*

JOE: Competely inked and lettered. Frank and **Nestor Redondo** have a whole bunch of guys that work with them. I guess if Frank is available and does the job all by himself it comes out real well, but every once in a while they have one of the other fellows working on it, and the completed artwork leaves a lot to be desired, as far as the finishes are concerned. The character of Sgt. Rock is supposed to look like what my concept of him was. Often I've had to paste over the artwork and re-draw Rock, but even that's impossible for me to do all the time, with all the other stuff I have to handle. I'm pretty much satisfied with the way SGT. ROCK is done, but if I were able to find somebody here in the United States who could do the job well, my preference would be to have somebody local do it. I've spoken to **Dan Spiegle** who's done a couple of them, but he's so damn busy that it's been impossible to keep him. **John Severin** did it for a while, but he's got too many things to do.

JIM: *Didn't Russ Heath do it for a while?*

On this page and next three pages: art from Kubert's new series, THE REDEEMER. Above: the Infernal One. Overleaf: Torkan, the Redeemer.

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JOE: Yes, **Russ Heath** did it beautifully, except that it's very difficult to put out a monthly magazine when you get the artwork every two months! So I wasn't able to have Russ continue. Russ happens to be a very good friend of mine, and on a personal level we get along very, very well. But there was a time I could have very easily killed him. *(Laughter.)* He had real trouble meeting deadlines. Suffice it to say that if I could find somebody locally who could really do the job, I'd much prefer somebody like that — but I haven't. I just haven't been able to find somebody local to do SGT. ROCK.

JIM: *How long has SGT. ROCK been around?*

JOE: Over thirty years.

JIM: *So it's definitely a durable, strong character. It seems that comic-fans now seem to ignore the non-super-hero types, and as a result, a lot of the young artists coming up seem to be interested only in doing super-hero/science-fiction comics. Have any younger artists approached you, trying to do SGT. ROCK or other war material?*

JOE: No, I haven't really entertained that type of situation. I haven't been making any overt moves towards that end. But I think you are right about the field. I think that's a dangerous kind of situation, where the popularity of the super-hero has limited the diversity of *genres*, and that in turn is limiting the diversity of artistic styles. The newcomers shouldn't be so limited. Cartoonists have to be like a renaissance artist — they should be able to do any thing. Because if this super-hero *genre* really softens up, and there's a surplus of guys who can do the superhero stuff, there's gonna be a lot of people out there looking for work, if they can't do other things, like mystery or adventure.

JIM: *It's very difficult to fake war stories. You have to have people who are experts on weapons and vehicles —*

JOE: That's right. If you draw a tank in a story that isn't the right tank, or a rifle that doesn't look like a rifle, you hear about it. No question.

JIM: *Have there been any continued stories in SGT. ROCK?*

JOE: We've done that a couple of times.

JIM: *What has the response been to that kind of story?*

JOE: Not one that we would recognize as being a heavy enough response that we would follow it up with more continued stories. Although it's hard to judge, now, because I'm talking about a time ten years ago when, with the kind of sales that we had at that time — all through the newsstands — it was really impossible to make

JOE KUBERT

"I just stepped away from the GREEN

any kind of a judgment on popularity of continued stories with the readers. It's different now. You can get a response almost immediately in the direct sales and know right away if something is going to be acceptable, if it's going to sell. This is great. The kind of immediacy is similar to that which we had in syndication.

JIM: *You mean with comic-strips?*

JOE: Yes, with newspaper strips. You'd know from the readership right away, how you were doing, which direction you should take. That's the one thing that I've felt newspapers have always had which was so superior to that which was happening in comic-books — the immediate feedback. Up until recently, in comic-books we wouldn't get a response from the marketplace for perhaps six months. In newspapers you knew the response within six to ten weeks, because you got it in the form of letters from people who wrote into the papers. You knew almost immediately how receptive the readership was to the ideas that you were trying out.

JIM: *Yeah, I've thought about that, and I tend to think that the way the direct sales system is set up is probably even superior to newspapers, in that you're basically dealing with maybe ten different distributors who are very close to what the stores are buying, the kind of material that is being produced. Their sole interest is selling comic books.*

JOE: That's a critical area that you just touched upon. And the most remarkable difference between that which happened in syndication and that which is happening with direct sales, is the interest and the involvement that the distributors have in comic-books. The comic-book distributors in direct sales are the fans — the people who loved this business right from the beginning. But that also tends to be a dangerous situation, too. The over-abundance of super-heroes is a direct result of the fans so loving the *genre* that they're into now that there's a lack of enthusiasm among the dealers in widening other areas of interest. The dealer is both a fan and a businessman. And super-heroes are what's selling.

JIM: *Yet feedback on newspaper strips is limited even more because you don't have direct access to the readers. You produce something — a comic-strip — that will appear in a newspaper, but isn't the reason the consumer is buying the newspaper.*

JOE: It used to be.

JIM: *Yeah, but now you're really selling to the syndicates who are mostly into humor strips —*

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JOE: *Only* into humor strips.

JIM: *Exactly. And the syndicate sells to newspaper editors —*

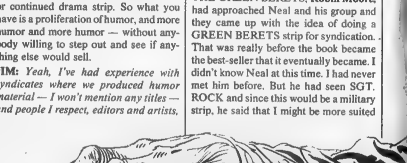
JOE: Who couldn't care less about comics. They couldn't care whether comic-strips appear in their newspaper or not. Jim, I've been involved with the syndicates, and they will be the first to tell you that they really don't know *what* is going to sell. Some of us in the business look at newspaper strips today and say, "How could *anybody* call this a professional comic-strip?" The reason for it is that the syndicates are floundering. They have no criteria, no way of gauging what's going to sell, and they won't take any chances. They don't want to shake the boat. They won't even *try* a continuity strip, because they feel so strongly that the reaction from the newspaper editors will be so negative. They will be absolutely timorous about showing any interest in an adventure or continued drama strip. So what you have is a proliferation of humor, and more humor and more humor — without anybody willing to step out and see if anything else would sell.

JIM: *Yeah, I've had experience with syndicates where we produced humor material — I won't mention any titles — and people I respect, editors and artists, said this was the kind of comic they'd like to see. But what happened is we were dealing with a syndicate, and the syndicate had such a definite idea of what they wanted, that eventually we just got out of it. And the syndicate produced a strip which was not funny at all, and which did not do that well anyway. The strip that appeared was done exactly the way the syndicate wanted it, but when it flopped, the syndicate said, "Well, it was the characters."* (Laughter.)

JOE: They will certainly not take on the responsibility of having made the decision themselves — none of them will. It's what we call "passing the buck." There are so many stories like that, Jim. Once I was approached by the New York DAILY NEWS. They wanted me to do a new TERRY AND THE PIRATES strip, and they were going through the whole business of setting everything up. As a matter of fact, we had signed a contract. They had issued a lot of information, to columnists and so forth, that I would be doing the strip. But they were also negotiating to have TERRY AND THE PIRATES done as a movie. First, the movie was going to be done, then it wasn't going to be done. It was the typical Hollywood kind of a deal, where you're not actually sure about anything or where you actually stand. And they felt that the strip, TERRY AND THE PIRATES, was not strong enough to go by itself without the movie. Now, they loved the story, they loved the artwork, they loved the opportunity of putting TERRY out again, but they would not take the chance of doing it without that added impetus of the movie.

JIM: *What about THE GREEN BERETS strip? How did that start?*

JOE: THE GREEN BERETS strip was as the result of a recommendation by **Neal Adams**. **Neal Adams** was working on a BEN CASEY strip with some other people, and the guy who wrote the book THE GREEN BERETS, **Robin Moore**, had approached Neal and his group and they came up with the idea of doing a GREEN BERETS strip for syndication. That was really before the book became the best-seller that it eventually became. I didn't know Neal at this time. I had never met him before. But he had seen SGT. ROCK and since this would be a military strip, he said that I might be more suited



BERETS strip. I said, 'I can't tolerate this.'"

to doing it. I was then approached, we talked about it, and that's how it came about. I think that the strip started in 1967 and ran for about two and a half years. **Robin Moore** was very enthusiastic about it, especially since he was trying to push the book at that time, and we really completed quite a coup by selling it to the syndicate. It was a military type strip, but actually the whole strip, the whole story, revolved around a reporter not around the military. We could have taken that reporter any place in the world and pulled it away from The Green Berets, just as TERRY AND THE PIRATES no longer dealt with pirates after it got started. But somehow the writer got the bit in his teeth. The understanding when we started was I would have final say over the editorial content. That was the basis upon which the strip was sold. But once it started going, the writer suddenly ran away with himself, and suddenly in script form, I would be getting all kinds of political and patriotic treatises, in the form of comic strips. They were supposed to be interesting. They sure as hell were not! The strip was just not the platform for that kind of material. We were using the military and the book tie-in gimmick to get the thing sold into the newspapers, but that could not be where it was going to stay once we got rolling. We wanted a strip full of romance and adventure and all those other things. That was what the whole idea of the strip was about.

JIM: *What eventually happened to it?*

JOE: The thing ran for about a year afterwards — despite the writing and not because of it. There were several people writing it, and my trying to re-write proved impossible. If you've ever worked on a syndicated strip, you get a whole bunch of scripts from a writer, and then, before you can start to draw them you have to go through them and make some semblance of sense out of them for yourself — well, it's a horror. An absolute and total horror. And eventually I just stepped away from the strip. I said, "I can't tolerate this." And I just stopped it. The strip continued — there were several artists who tried doing it — but then it went down the drain. But I don't think it was because I left. I don't think that *anybody* could have made it go with that kind of storyline. It was really spelling its own demise.

JIM: *I remember seeing the WINNIE WINKLE strip which you did. It was quite a dramatic change of style for the strip, and it really looked very good.*

JOE: Well, that was a proposal that came through my school. I've never solicited any work for the school. I was asked by the syndicate to do WINNIE WINKLE. They were having problems at the time — I think one of the artists was ill, or the artist who was doing it had gotten old, or died, or something like that — and they asked if I had some people at my school who might be able to handle that strip. See, at the school, we have a Work-Study Program, which we make available mostly to our second and third-year students, under the supervision of one of the instructors or myself. We will then take on this kind of a job, and what it does is permits the student some hands-on experience right in the profession itself, while still being led by the hand, so to speak, by a professional. The advantage to the student is he does work that acts as sort of a bridge between what he has been doing in school and what he will eventually be doing as a professional. The advantage to the person who gives out that job — the syndicate, in this case — is that they have access to some very talented people, and they know that the quality of that work will not fall below a certain accepted standard of professionalism. It went on for a year, incidentally, that WINNIE WINKLE.

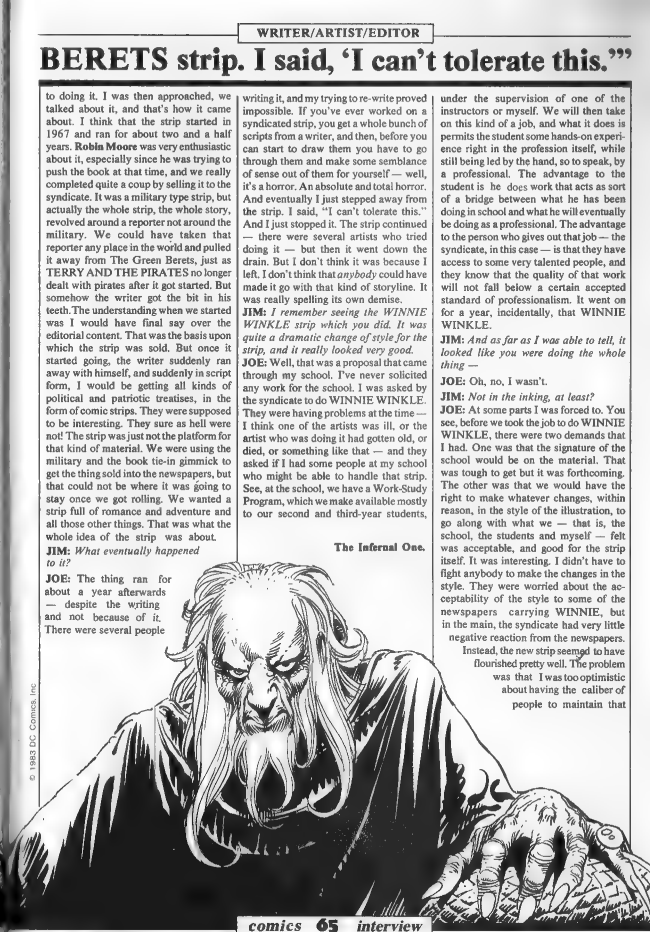
JIM: *And as far as I was able to tell, it looked like you were doing the whole thing —*

JOE: Oh, no, I wasn't.

JIM: *Not in the inking, at least?*

JOE: At some parts I was forced to. You see, before we took the job to do WINNIE WINKLE, there were two demands that I had. One was that the signature of the school would be on the material. That was tough to get but it was forthcoming. The other was that we would have the right to make whatever changes, within reason, in the style of the illustration, to go along with what we — that is, the school, the students and myself — felt was acceptable, and good for the strip itself. It was interesting. I didn't have to fight anybody to make the changes in the style. They were worried about the acceptability of the style to some of the newspapers carrying WINNIE, but in the main, the syndicate had very little negative reaction from the newspapers. Instead, the new strip seemed to have flourished pretty well. The problem was that I was too optimistic about having the caliber of people to maintain that

The Infernal One.



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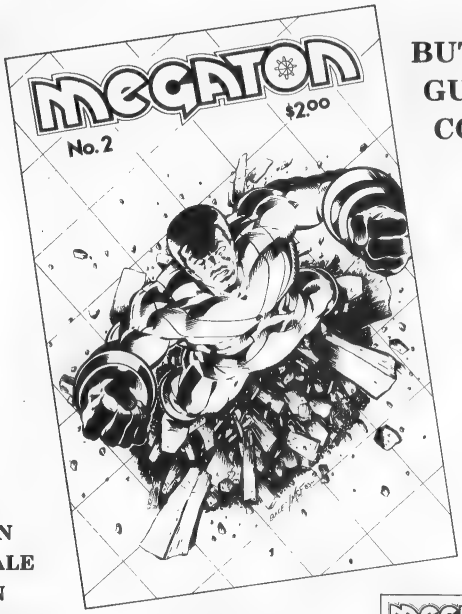

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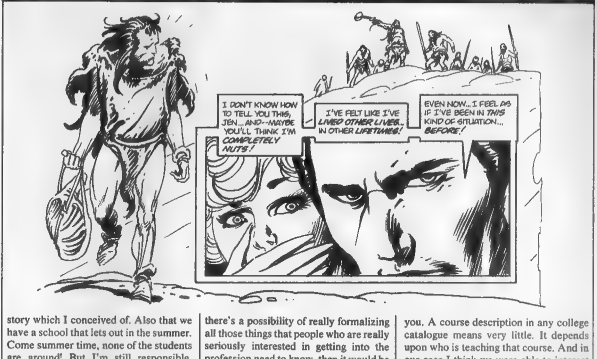
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TELL YOU THIS, DEN, AND--MAYBE YOU'LL THINK I'M COMPLETELY NUTS.
I'VE FELT LIKE I'VE LIVED OTHER LIVES, IN OTHER LIFETIMES!
EVEN NOW...I FEEL AS IF I'VE BEEN IN THIS KIND OF SITUATION... BEFORE!

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story which I conceived of. Also that we have a school that lets out in the summer. Come summer time, none of the students are around! But I'm still responsible, because the syndicate is dealing with me and I'm working for them directly. Whether the students are still available or not, that strip still has to be turned out. And the fact that you recognized a lot of my style was because a lot of the strip was me!

JIM: *Which students did work on it?*

JIM: *Well,* **Mike Chen** worked on some of it, **Sal Amendola** did some work on it, and there were at least three or four other students who were working on it that same time.

JIM: *How did the Joe Kubert School evolve?*

JOE: The idea of the school is really a result of my own experience in the business itself. In my capacity as an artist and an editor in comics, like any other guy who has any experience at all, beginners will ask you for advice. And they'll ask you some of the most basic questions. Of course there's no way of acquiring that kind of information usually. In my case, when I started out, someone told me, you use this kind of paper, this brush, this pencil, this is the way you prepare your work, and so on. Every artist I know, including myself, has helped people along the way. When people are close enough to me, I'll help them out in whichever way I can. It's a kind of a pay-back. **John Costanza** learned lettering from me — I gave him private lessons in my house. There were other people I've been able to help along the way just as I have been helped. And for years I figured, "Well, if there's a possibility of really formalizing all those things that people who are really seriously interested in getting into the profession need to know, then it would be great to put a school together."

Anyhow, my wife and I have been living in New Jersey, in Dover, for lo-these-many-years, and our five kids were getting older and out on their own, so we — my wife especially — were not tied up with the kids like before. My wife is a business graduate. When I proposed to her the idea of starting a school, where it wouldn't jeopardise my own career, where I could continue to do my own work and draw — which I will never give up under any conditions — her famous last words were, "Let's take a crack at it." Well, as it turns out, my wife is really the one who runs the whole damn place. She's there to make sure that everything operates smoothly.

JIM: *Do you teach there?*

JOE: A couple of days a week. We have about 15 other instructors — guys like **Irwin Hasen** and **Tex Blaisdell** and **Jose Delbo** and **Greg Hildebrandt,** who's teaching there now, **Ric Estrada** and **Lee Elias** — quite a number of the most outstanding guys in the world. **Dick Giordano** taught there awhile.

We were talking shortly before about the different kinds of courses that you had taken in high school, relative to cartooning, and how you quit school because what you were looking for really wasn't there. Well, I think the same thing applies to any course that you take in any place of higher learning. What you learn really depends upon the instructor who's teaching it to you. A course description in any college catalogue means very little. It depends upon who is teaching that course. And in our case I think we were able to interest enough people who had faith in what I was trying to do, to participate, to work into their schedule coming to the school one, two, or three days a week, while continuing their own work — which is the same thing I do — teaching those students who make the complete and total commitment to apply themselves to this profession, with the idea being that they're going to make a livelihood from it. And that takes one hell of a lot of hard work.

JIM: *How long is the course of study?*

JOE: It is a three-year school, three years of a very, very heavy, tight schedule. We compress into those three years that which took me and any other guy in the business anywhere from ten, twelve years and up to acquire — all those facets of the business that you have to have in order to be sure that you're going to make a viable livelihood over an extended period of time.

(Dick Giordano sticks head in door.)

JIM: *Hi, Dick*

DICK GIORDANO: Hi. Joe, do you know you have a note out here?

JOE: No, I didn't know.

DICK: It says "cc **Dick Giordano**" but it's not signed. I hope you recognize the handwriting.

(Dick exits.)

JIM: *What do the courses cover now?*

JOE: It's a ten-course curriculum. Besides cartooning, we have things like paste-ups and mechanicals — which is one reason that a guy like **Ron Zalme** was able to

"You want everybody to feel free to

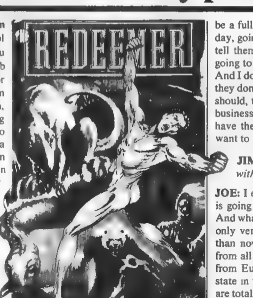
Photos: Jim Salicrup

contribute as much as they possibly can."

step into production at Marvel. **Tom Mandrake's** first job out of our school was as art director for a magazine. You are not able to handle that kind of job just being able to draw cartoons or funny pictures. No, the curriculum includes hand-lettering, color separation, the whole gamut — in addition to refining the ability to draw, and in addition to narrative art — that is, being able to tell a story dramatically in a picture form — in addition to color information, in addition to knowing how to do comic-book or comic-strip work, commercial comics, editorial cartoons and sports cartoons. Anywhere that a cartoonist can get a job. Because a guy who wants to get into this business and limits his knowledge only to drawing comic books, is also putting a limitation on his ability to be able to make a living.

JIM: *So what about people who just want to specialize —*

JOE: I will not accept them. I tell them in the interview, "If you're coming here just to learn about comic-books and you're not going to apply yourself to all the other courses, you are not accepted here." Every student must pass every one of the 10 courses in the curriculum to go from the first to the second year. If they flunk one of the courses, they're not going to go into the next year. The reason is that there are no extraneous courses. Every course there is integral to that which a person has to know to be a cartoonist. And the other important factor is that each one of the



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courses also prepares a student for an entry-level positon in the field, so that if the student flunks one course, he's just cut away the ability to get a job in any one of three or four places. He's not coming out of that school with my assurance for him to be able to get a job unless he's passed every one of those courses. He doesn't have to be a Michaelangelo. But he has to know how to handle himself in any one of these fields.

JIM: *But it's still focused on drawing —*

JOE: Oh, yes.

JIM: *— not on writing comics.*

JOE: It's not a writing school, it's strictly illustration. We also have an animation school that's extant at the same time. We teach storyboarding, both for animation and for live film.

JIM: *Is that a separate course?*

JOE: Every student takes the same courses.

It's a small school and it started off where we expected enrollment to peak at seventy-five students. Well, we've gone beyond that now. Partially, this is the result of what's happened to students who have come out of school. We find that there are graduates like **Ron Randall** and **Tom Mandrake** and **Jan Duursema** doing wonderful things. It speaks well for the school.

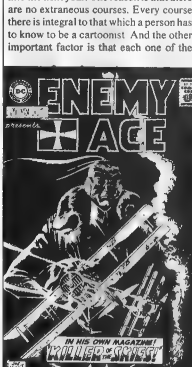
JIM: *How do you select applicants?*

JOE: I interview them, and the interview takes at least an hour to an hour-and-a-half. My thrust, my approach, is to dissuade them from enrolling. I tell them how tough it's going to be. I tell them that the three years they'll be attending the school it will be a full schedule, 8 to 10 to 12 hours a day, going to bed at two in the morning. I tell them of all the tough parts that it's going to take to make it in this business. And I don't exaggerate. Because in fact it they don't apply themselves the way they should, then they'll never make it in this business. Despite that, we find they still have the kind of motivation where they want to come and work and do this.

JIM: *Where do you expect to go with the school?*

JOE: I expect that eventually the school is going to be a very elite kind of place. And what I mean by that is that it'll be for only very serious people, even more so than now. We have people come to us from all over the world — from Nigeria, from Europe, from Canada, from every state in the United States. These people are totally dedicated to wanting to do this and are willing to put out the effort. And with the influx of applicants and the very limited space we have, we're gonna be forced to become even more and more selective. And so those people who will be eventually part of the school will be those who have the most steadfast dedication and will be willing to put out the heaviest effort.

But it's tough for me to turn people down. As I said at the beginning. I still remember what it was like when I was starting out — the smell of the ink and the excitement that I felt remain with me. It's hard for me to deny that to someone else.



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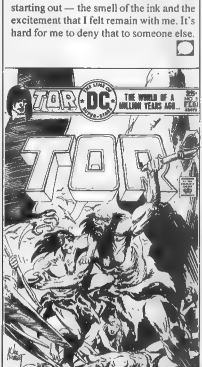

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Little Wendy went to church
but she didn't go to pray...

For in this church the
cross dripped blood

and little girls were
brought to slay.

NIGHTVEIL 2
'BLOOD RITES!'

by Steve Ringgenberg, Mark Heike and Bill Anderson

"I feel lettering helps sell the comic."

BOB PINAHA

Lately, Bob Pinaha's name has been appearing more and more frequently in lettering credits of alternative comics -- Comico's MAGE, WaRP's A DISTANT SOIL, and most regularly in Bill Black's Americomics line (BLACK DIAMOND, AMERICOMICS) -- so I spoke to him about his work in the alternatives, and found that having established a beachhead for himself with DC's NEW TALENT SHOWCASE, Bob is planning to drive deeper into mainstream territory . . .

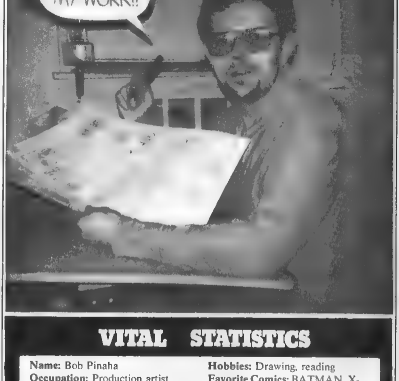

Photo: Denice E. Suradeau

BILL CHADWICK: *Bob, you're now doing steady work for Americomics -- do you ever feel like going mainstream, or do you feel that you've found a home in the alternatives?*

BOB PINAHA: I'd like to get into the mainstream publishers. The trouble with that that I've found, while doing work for DC, is that they want you to do the job practically overnight, so they want you to be on call -- but they're not willing to guarantee you enough work to pay your bills.

BILL: *Have you tried Marvel?*

BOB: Yes, but I get the runaround from them.

BILL: *Well, how did you break into comics?*

BOB: I was working for a bus company here in central Jersey, doing little mechanical jobs -- paste-ups and things like that -- but also dealing with the public, and the public's erratic behavior. So I finally quit and started building up a clientele doing paste-ups and mechanicals on my own, which led to the full-time job I have now as a production artist, doing work for Pepsi -Cola and CBS News and places like that. But I also started sending samples of my lettering out to the comic-book companies -- Marvel, DC, First Comics, Eclipse, and eventually **Bill Black** of Americomics. He was the first to give me a chance to do some professional comic-book lettering, and I'm extremely grateful to him. I hope I'm living up to the standards he is looking for.

BILL: *Had you been interested in comics as a fan?*

BOB: Oh, yes. I've been collecting comics since 1958. When I was a kid my mother went away to Pennsylvania to take care of her mother -- my grandmother -- for a week, and she came back with a whole load of comics. I remember the first ones I read were a JIMMY OLSEN comic, and a BOB HOPE. I saved them, began collecting, and I now have a collection of 18,000 comics.

BILL: *Wow! And when did you decide to try to break into comics as a professional?*

BOB: Two years ago I was part of a fan club called The Fans of Central Jersey, and we interviewed **Rudy Nebres**, who was living in West Orange. Coincidentally, a few years later, after the fan club broke up, we wound up living about a mile from each other. We became very close friends. One of our common interests is videotapes. He likes kung-fu movies and I like science-fiction, fantasy and horror. Anyway, Rudy suggested that since I was interested in lettering, that I try lettering for comics. He gave me technical pointers, and I began studying various styles and elements

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bob Pinaha
Occupation: Production artist
Born: 26 July 1953 -- South Amboy, New Jersey
Residence: Highland Park, NJ
Training: Pan-American Art School, New York City
Credits: DC's NEW TALENT SHOWCASE, DRAGONFLY, BLACK DIAMOND, MAGE, A DISTANT SOIL
Hobbies: Drawing, reading
Favorite Comics: BATMAN, X-MEN
Favorite Letterer: Joe Rosen. His lettering is what lettering should be -- it's unobtrusive, compact, neat and makes your eye move across the page the way it should.
Pet Peeve: Getting the runaround from the big mainstream comic publishers

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wouldn't make good reading either...

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"I had to change some things I was doing."

of lettering on my own, and it became an obsession with me to see whether or not I could accomplish it. It also grew out of a need to perfect what I was doing.

BILL: *Well, after you submitted lettering samples to Americomics, did Bill Black just send you an assignment in reply?*

BOB: What happened was that about eight or nine months ago, **Rik Levins**, who's now an associate editor at Americomics, was living up here in New Jersey, but he was vacationing in Florida and was at Americomics in Longwood, Florida, when **Bill Black** received my samples in the mail. **Bill Black** asked Rik, "You think you could use him up there?" At the time Rik was working as artist of DRAGONFLY. And Rik said, "Sure, he lives right by me." So when he got back from Florida here to Jersey, he called me up. And ever since **Bill Black** has been supplying me with work, even though I'm not very proud of that first job I did for him.

BILL: *Why not?*

BOB: Up until that time I was working on full-size comic pages, and I did not know what any of my stuff looked like reduced. So when the DRAGONFLY came out I saw for the first time what my lettering looked like reduced. I knew immediately I had to change some of the things that I was doing wrong.

BILL: *Such as?*

BOB: First of all, I was working with the Ames Lettering Guide and using the wrong set of holes.

BILL: *For those of us who don't know, what is the Ames Lettering Guide?*

BOB: It's a little device that you put on your T-square. It has holes up and down on the line. You put your pencil down in one hole, slide it across the T-square in one direction, then you put your pencil in the next hole, and slide it back the other way, and you just keep going back and forth on your T-square and just keep alternating holes. It gives you the proper guidelines for doing the lettering. If you ever read the instructions, they make no sense whatsoever. I didn't find out I was using the wrong set of holes until I did an assignment for DC and **Karen Berger** gave me a copy of the lettering sheet for all letterers at DC. When I saw DRAGONFLY, and saw my lettering on the reduced page, I saw the spacing was wrong between the lines. Also, the strokes were a little bit thick. So I sanded down the tip of the pen I use so that the tip was a little bit thinner, and I think my second job for COMMANDO D in AMERICOMICS #5 came out much nicer.

Right now I'm working on a SHADE/TARA team-up for the next AMERICOMICS, with **Rik Levins** doing the pencils and **Willie Blyberg** inking.

BILL: *What are some of the problems a letterer has to deal with?*

BOB: The biggest problem is that pencillers have no idea whatsoever on proper composition when it comes to lettering. In other words, they compose the panels and the pages in a visual style which moves the story along, but they do not take into consideration the space inside the composition in which the lettering will go. For example, when I did the first issue of MAGE for Comico, **Matt Wagner**, the artist, had all the balloons inked in when he sent me the artwork, so all I had to do was place the lettering in the balloons according to his script. But he'd have enormous balloons where maybe four or five words went, and in another panel have twenty-five words in a tiny balloon! It's my biggest complaint. I guess the pencillers aren't aware of it, and don't keep in mind balloon placement and where the words will go and things like that. It's the letterer's job to place the balloons in the best place — where they'll move the story along.

Figure study by Bob Pinaha.

© 1994 Bob Pinaha

BILL: *Do the pencillers rough in the script on the art, or do you get the script separately from the art?*

BOB: There are different ways of doing it. When I first started working with **Rik Levins** on .DRAGONFLY, he would pencil in the words on the art. In fact, he pencilled them in with the guidelines, and his guidelines were in fact much too big for comic-book lettering. They leaped off the page at you. His compositions suffered because the words that he pencilled in were so big. I requested that he just submit the pencilled pages to me with the words on a separate piece of paper. When he got used to that, his compositions started improving, and he left balloon placement to me, so I could give the placement far more dramatic effect. **Matt Wagner** gave me a separate script, but he also gave me a little diagram of the page giving me a breakdown of the art, and he numbered that little diagram according to where the balloons would go.

BILL: *You mentioned that you have a regular job as a production artist. Do you think you'll ever do comic-book lettering full time?*

BOB: I'm hoping that I'll get good enough to be able to do it full-time. But I think I still have a way to go. However, I feel my stuff is getting better and better, each time I do an assignment.

BILL: *Is there any comic in particular that you've always wanted to letter?*

BOB: No, I find each lettering assignment rewarding in its own right. I find lettering to be very creative in that you are conveying a story. Even the shapes of the balloons help convey the composition of the whole page and help move the story along. The most important thing is that lettering has to be unobtrusive. The more unobtrusive it is, the more successful the lettering is. I feel lettering helps sell the comic. When a potential reader is paging through a magazine, the lettering is a factor in his buying it. He may not know it, but it is.

"Women have been trained in color since

Photo: Anthony Tollin

infancy. It's a matter of teaching the eye to see."

ADRIENNE ROY

On a recent visit to DC Comics one chilly winter afternoon to deliver the latest script pages for a new issue of WORLD'S FINEST, accompanied by Lesley Benjamin-Aull and wearing my ever-present "walkman" cassette recorder, I acted upon opportunity to conduct an impromptu interview with Adrienne Roy, a very colorful colorist — both figuratively and literally. The three of us closeted ourselves in E. Nelson Bridwell's abandoned office after 5 o'clock for the following conversation . . .

LESLEY BENJAMIN-AULL: *There seems to be a preponderance of women in coloring. Do you think that for some reason women are uniquely qualified to be colorists?*

ADRIENNE ROY: Well, I have read that there seems to be a greater frequency of color-blindness among men than among women. But I don't think that men are any *less* qualified than women to be colorists. Women have just been trained in color since infancy, particularly for fashion. Little girls go with their mommies to pick out clothing, while boys are playing with trucks — that kind of thing. It's a matter of teaching the eye to see in terms of color.

DAK: *Are there books that are easy to color and others that are difficult?*

ADRIENNE: Oh, yes. Books like TEEN TITANS that have a lot of characters are difficult to color, because you have to make them all work with one another, and then find a background color that will still work for all of them. I was just coloring costumes for two new members of the Teen Titans — which I can't say anything more about, until the characters make their debut in print — and it was pretty challenging.

DAK: *Did you just concentrate on the two new costumes, or did you worry about how they'd work with those of the other Titans, too?*

ADRIENNE: One thing I was concerned about is that we already have a lot of red costumes in the Titans — Wonder Girl and the Changeling, in particular. I was trying to come up with colors that would fit in with the group. You want some contrast between different characters, otherwise it'll look like just a bunch of people with the same uniforms. The Titans each have a unique identity, and the whole point that **Marv Wolfman** has been trying to make with the book is that they're all individual people.

"Every SUPERMAN, by its mood, is a day-time

DAK: *Give us an example of a book that's relatively easy to color.*

ADRIENNE: There are some books that color themselves — they just shout the color out! BATMAN is one of them. Sometimes you have to feel the character — have a feeling of what the character is going through — in order to understand what colors to use.

LESLEY: *When Jim Salicrup interviewed Marvel colorist Andy Yanchus for our fourth issue, Andy talked about the importance of maintaining the continuity of costumed characters. How do you do it?*

ADRIENNE: Oh, I have to take notes. Not only that, but sometimes I'll be doing a story with a character who came from the Forties. The writer or artist may decide to change elements of the costume, but it is important — because DC has such a wonderful history that goes back decades — to go back to the old issues and research the coloring of the original costumes.

DAK: *The same way a writer would research to see how the character spoke back then . . .*

ADRIENNE: Sure. This is history. Also, because all our main characters are licensed it's very important that they have the same costumes — including the same coloring — in every issue.

DAK: *Do you consider light sources when you color?*

ADRIENNE: Oh, yes. Especially on a BATMAN story. I won't try to pin every series down, but for instance every SUPERMAN story, by its mood, is a day-time story, and every BATMAN story — even if it takes place during the day — is a night-time story. I try for mood as well as contrast — for BATMAN, say, a mood that will fit his image.

DAK: *Did you have any specialized training?*

ADRIENNE: I took a general art course in college and had color classes. I had a very good color professor who trained us in the artistic uses of colors, although I had no idea I would one day be a colorist.

DAK: *How long have you been coloring?*

ADRIENNE: About seven years.

DAK: *Then you must have it down to a fine art by now.*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Adrienne Roy

Occupation: *Fargar.* That's how I'm listed in Scandinavian comics. It means "colorist."

Born: 28 June 1953, Paterson, NJ

Residence: Fairfield, NJ

Training: Art courses in William Paterson State College. Learned comics coloring techniques from Jack Adler of DC and husband Anthony Tollin.

Credits: BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDERS, TEEN TITANS, ARAK, HOUSE OF MYSTERY, OMEGA MEN, BATMAN.

Hobbies and interests: Tattoos. Collecting fossils and antiques. Reading horror stories — especially vampire stories.

ADRIENNE: I'm still learning — I'll never stop learning.

LESLEY: *How long does it take to color a comic? Since you work at home, are you very disciplined?*

ADRIENNE: Not quite as much as I should be, as far as keeping regular hours is concerned. If a book has to be done, I'll sit down and do it. A page, depending on its complexity, takes anywhere from a half-hour to forty-five minutes — sometimes an hour. Covers take even longer, because the elements have to be so carefully balanced.

DAK: *What are your first moves? Where do you begin?*

ADRIENNE: All colorists have their own methods. Of the different techniques, I've tried them all. One is to go through the entire story and put in all the flesh tones. If you do it that way, it's helpful to read the story at the same time — you get your feet wet, to try to understand what you can do with the story. And then you go through the story and put in all the yellows, and then put in all the blues, and so forth.

The other method, which I think I like better, is to do each page one at a time, going from light values to dark, working on each single page in sequence. That way if you're working with, say, a green room, it stays green — it doesn't change colors. That's important, 'cause the reader identifies with color and space. If the characters get up out of the green room and walk into an orange room, the orange room should stay orange and the other room should stay green.

LESLEY: *With books printed on Baxter or Mando paper, there is a greater vibrancy to the colors. Does that entail any special techniques?*

ADRIENNE: You try to color not as brightly, because the paper is already bright and glossy. With Baxter and Mando, the eye can distinguish greater subtleties than on regular comic-book paper, so you can use a greater range of colors, but you can't be quite as bright.

DAK: *Speaking of bright colors, tell us about your tattoo — weren't you on the PM MAGAZINE television show recently?*

ADRIENNE: Yes, because I've got a great big tattoo on my back, and PM MAGAZINE wanted to cover the growing interest in tattooing among women. They found three women who had tattoos. One had a little butterfly on the web of her hand that she was upset about, because she didn't want it anymore and everybody could see it. Another woman had a unicorn on her backside that she thought was real spiffy. And then there was me.

DAK: *Unlike the lady with the butterfly, I gather you're not upset about your tattoo?*

ADRIENNE: No, I love my tattoo. In 1982, I won Best Tattoo at a Tattoo Convention — I've had this thing for over two years now.

LESLEY: *Was it painful to get?*

ADRIENNE: Bony areas are painful, but there is a point where if you want the tattoo enough, you accept the pain. I'm not a masochist — there are parts that really hurt — but it was worth it, because I liked the design.

DAK: *Who did the tattooing?*

ADRIENNE: Bob Roberts, now in Hollywood. I wanted a dragon. He wanted me to give him an idea of what kind. The only thing I had was a silhouette of a

story. Every BATMAN is a night-time story."

dragon that a Japanese gentleman had cut out for me. I showed it to Bob, and he was the colorist, in this case.

DAK: *So you're the colorist who's also been colored!* (Laughter.)

ADRIENNE: It's a different medium entirely from comics. There are certain colors in tattooing that work together and that work best in the skin. I let Bob pick out the colors, and I was in total agreement with his choice. Except for purple, which I thought he was over doing a bit.

LESLEY: *Getting back to comics — do you like them, as a reader?*

ADRIENNE: I love them. It annoys me the way people put comics down, the way they did when I was growing up. You know, "Comic books aren't good for you," and, "Still reading that junk?" Because I know that in the comics I've been reading, the writers strive for intelligent, well thought-out stories, often with the stories hinging on a significant plot device in which the reader learns something new that he may not ordinarily have thought about. In BATMAN, maybe some method of detection, or in SUPERMAN, some elements of science. I also notice — especially in **Julie Schwartz's** books, although other writers do it, too — the use of polysyllabic words that a younger reader can figure out in context.

DAK: *I learned the word "invulnerable" from SUPERMAN.*

ADRIENNE: Reading should be fun. It's a fundamental part of learning — but it needn't be arduous.

DAK: *Why do you think that comics are attracting an older audience these days?*

ADRIENNE: I think it's because there has been such a history of comics. The people who were readers in the Sixties are still readers. Also, I think there had *always* been an older readership, but maybe now older readers are finally admitting it.

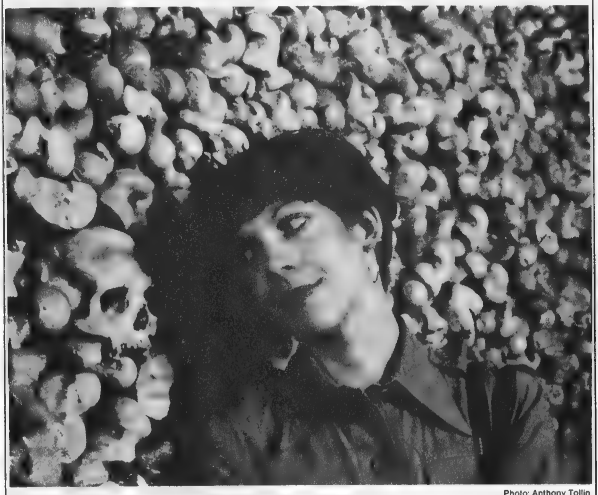
DAK: *I know what you mean. When I was growing up, I had a very stern uncle, who could be seen late at night reading SAD SACK comics — they were his secret vice.*

ADRIENNE: Reading comics is a release at times, too. Your uncle probably *needed* that. I don't think he would be human if he didn't have an element of humanity in him that would allow him to read SAD SACK.

DAK: *So you like coloring comics?*

ADRIENNE: I *love* coloring comics. I would like to get into full-process coloring for comics much more than I have in the past — but if coloring were all I were to do for the rest of my life, it would suit me just fine.

Adrienne visiting an ancient crypt in Hythe, England.



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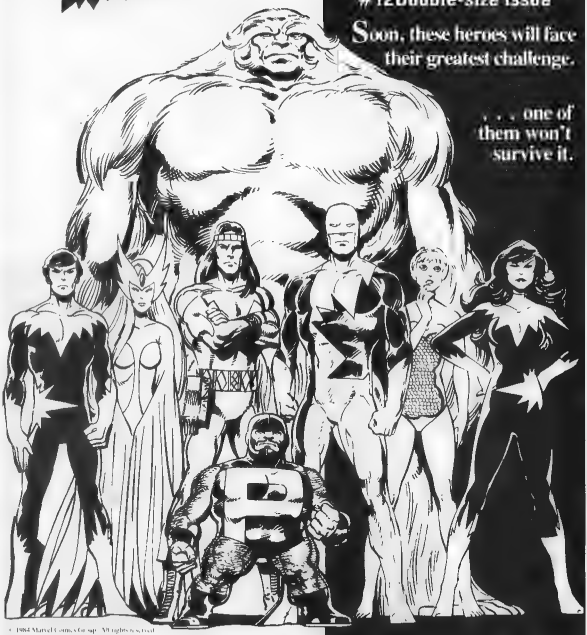

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new from MARVEL®

"I just wanted to belong at Marvel."

DANNY CRESPI

For over a decade, Danny Crespi has played a crucial but often overlooked role in the success of Marvel Comics. As trail-boss of the Marvel Bullpen, Danny is responsible for the many functions the Production Department must perform to get a comic book ready for printing: Putting the logos and copy on the covers, pasting in place the interior lettering, making any necessary last-minute corrections in the lettering and the art, and a thousand and one other details that take care, patience and considerable skill. Yet the Bullpen has always been a kind of family as well as a department, and chatting in his Marvel office with D. Jon Zimmerman, Danny recalled many fond and funny memories of friends and fellow workers.

D. JON ZIMMERMAN: *What was it like working for Marvel in the 1970s?*

DANNY CRESPI: It was a fun place. I was a letterer, and I used to love it behind the drawing board.

Z: *Who was with you at Timely in the old days?*

DANNY: **Morrie Kuramoto**, **John Severin**, his sister **Marie Severin**, **Carl Burgos**, **Sol Brodsky**, **Bill Everett**, **Chris Rule**, **Artie Simek**. **Stan Lee** was editor-in-chief and **Martin Goodman** was the head of the company.

Z: *Got any funny stories from back then?*

DANNY: I used to think drinking was a waste of time, but **Bill Everett** and **John Severin** kept asking me to go out to lunch with them, and so one day I went with them -- and they had to carry me back to the Bullpen.

Z: *How much did you have to drink?*

DANNY: Just one martini, and I didn't even finish it. It was horrible! Basically just a glass of gin which someone waved the vermouth over. (Laughter.) I still get stewed on one martini. But I liked the olive. To this day, I still like the olive. Not long ago I went out to lunch with the gang and while they were waiting for me to get to the restaurant, they ordered me a martini. It consisted of nine olives and a dribble of gin. (Laughter.)

(Marie Severin enters the office.)

DANNY: Oh, Marie, I was just disgracing your brother. I was saying how he taught me to booze.

MARIE SEVERIN: My brother, who was almost a priest, and you're saying such terrible things about him! (Laughter.) He never taught *me* to drink. **Joe Maneely** taught me. I couldn't go back to the office.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Danny Crespi
Occupation: Art Production Co-ordinator for Marvel Comics
Training: Was a letterer at Timely Comics in the 1950s, did freelance advertising presentation work, and assisted the late John Verpoorten in running the Marvel Production Department during the mid-1970s.
Credits: Designed the logos for MASTER OF KUNG FU and other Marvel titles; has contributed to the production of the entire Marvel line for the past twelve years.
Favorite drink: A martini with nine olives. (Laughter.) Actually, a strawberry malted, but I'm supposed to stay away from them.
Favorite colored suspenders: Red. John Byrne gave me these red suspenders. The doctor told me to wear suspenders because of my leg. They don't do a damn thing for my leg but I get a lot of compliments on them.

Z: *Marie, what was it like being the only woman in the office back then?*

MARIE: It was wonderful -- seventeen men and me. Actually, it was kind of

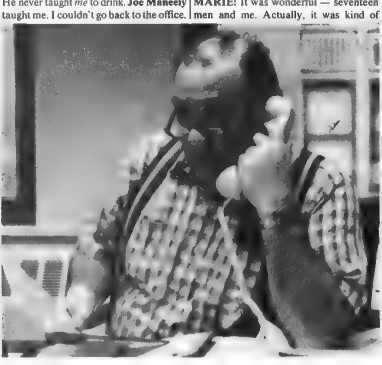

Photo: D. Jon Zimmerman

"Marvel was a fun place to work in the

stupid. "No girls allowed." They used to go on fishing trips and wouldn't let me go along.

DANNY: Well, we couldn't curse around you! Your brother would have punched out any of us who said something untoward around you! (Laughter.) *Marie exits.*

Z: *What was Sol Brodsky like back then?*

DANNY: Sol was an instigator, a trouble-maker — but not in a bad way, I mean in a joking way. We used to have card games at lunch, and **Artie Simek** used to get mad if anyone went out to lunch and left him without enough people for a card game. So whenever Artie wouldn't do something for Sol, Sol used to threaten him by saying, "Okay, I'm having lunch outside today!" Playing cards at lunch was such a big thing in Artie's life. He was such a good person, and a good letterer, too. I found that the majority of people in comics are nice.

Z: *Sol was an artist back then, right?*

DANNY: Yeah, he was a penciller, and a good one. I still have some stuff he did for the Big Boy hamburger chain — their BIG BOY giveaway comics. People have actually offered me money for those! Now he's an executive and I guess he has a lot of executive-size problems — but he's still fun.

Z: *What about Stan Lee? Was he writing the comics back then?*

DANNY: He was writing, but not much.

John Verpoorten

Basically, he was giving out the work. Then when they let most of us go, and there was just a few left — **Artie Simek**, Sol, **Stan Goldberg**, Stan began to do all the writing.

Z: *When did Timely let most of you go?*

DANNY: In 1957. It was because the distribution was all screwed up. They gave us two-week vacations, then when we came back they gave us two more weeks, then told us not to come back.

Z: *What did you do?*

DANNY: I began doing freelance lettering.

Z: *In comics?*

DANNY: No, in advertising. I told myself, "To Hell with comics — it must be dying if a big company like Timely can close up." I went to art studios doing board work and paste ups, then went to the presentation department of BBD & O and did Speedball lettering for them for 12 years.

Z: *How did you make out freelancing?*

DANNY: Money-wise it was okay but I didn't like freelancing *per se.* At one time I got used to it. I used to collect lettering assignments from different places and go home and do them. But for presentation work you're supposed to wait around by your phone 'til they call you, then go over to the studio to work. I don't like that. I don't like to wait around for people to call me. I like to belong to one place. Well, about twelve years ago I called up **Morrie Kuramoto** — I don't talk to him that often and once every twelve years is enough. (Laughter.) I didn't even know if he was still working at Marvel, but I heard he was. I asked if he had any work for me. He said, "Hey, man, I can use a hand. Come on down!" Then he told me to bring my own pen-holders! I said, "What kind of place is this?" Apparently they never had any spare fountain-pens or anything.

Z: *What was it like?*

DANNY: It was real small. There was no room. In fact, to get me a spare seat, I had to wait for when **Marie Severin** was working at home. They didn't even have

Cartoon by Marie Severin spoofing the old Timely (Marvel) Bullpen's men-only fishing trips — with Marie as a disgruntled mermaid.

old days. It's a fun place to work now."

shelves for supplies. Morrie had to rig up his own shelf — although why he thought a shelf held up by push-pins and rubber-bands would support two tons of rubber cement is beyond me. (Laughter.) The day I tipped the shelf over and knocked the rubber cement all over the place is one of the moments at Marvel I'd most like to forget. But Morrie gave me things to do. The pay was low — all the comics companies paid low wages in those days. But it was steady work. I wasn't on staff, but I felt I belonged there. I came to work every day. I would do corrections, paste-ups — everything the Bullpen does now.

Z: *John Verpoorten was the head of Marvel's production department back then, wasn't he?*

DANNY: Yes. We became very good friends. When you get older, you make very few friends — close personal friends, anyway. You may still have your childhood buddies, but the people you meet at work you call "friendly acquaintances" or "co-workers." But **John Verpoorten** was a friend.

Morrie introduced me to him. We were in this tiny office and I came across this huge, huge man. I mean, he could have snuffed out your life like nothing! And Morrie tells me, "Whatever you do, don't screw this man — he's a nice guy." I told Morrie, "I wouldn't screw this guy — he could kill me!" (Laughter.) After I was freelancing there steadily for a while, John offered me a job, and I said, "Yeah, sure," even though the wages were too low. It cost *me* money to work there! I didn't give a damn about the money — I just wanted to belong here, and I figured I could freelance at night. I had a family to support. One day John asked me why I was going to other places to get extra work when Marvel had plenty of extra work to give me, if I wanted to work at nights. He would go around to everyone and say, "I've got **Crespi** staying here at night and want you to have your work ready for him to finish by the time you go home." Eventually, I helped him run the Bullpen.

Z: *I came to work at Marvel just before he died. I remember my first impression of him — these huge shoulders and this deep voice, and this pipe.*

DANNY: He used to stay at night when I was working until seven or eight o'clock in the evening, doing cover-lettering and cover copy for nine-tenths of the covers. He'd be behind this partition that separated him from where Morrie and I would be working. And he was so light on his feet he'd sneak up to the partition, and while Morrie and I were concentrating on our

work, he'd put his head over the wall and go, "Boo!" I'd jump and throw my pen up in the air, and he'd laugh, and I'd say, "I'll never work here again!" But he'd apologize profusely. He was a baby — the sweetest guy you'd ever want to meet. Not that he was a patsy, but he would go out of his way for you. I know many people he helped — money-wise, work-wise. I miss him a hell of a lot. Of all of my friends who have left, I miss him the most. When he died I helped clean out his office, and I took his cigarette lighter just to have something of his. I don't smoke any more but I still carry that lighter in my pocket. Someone also gave me his Mickey Mouse cuff-links. They're too big for me but I keep 'em anyway. I still keep his picture around my office!

Z: *Did you and John have a social relationship outside the Bullpen?*

DANNY: Once a week, we'd go out to eat — him, me, **Vinnie Colletta, Stu Schwartzberg, Frank Giacoia** — at a steak house on Lexington Avenue, and shoot the bull while we ate. We had loads of fun. John was one of the wittiest guys I've ever met. Sharp as a tack. At first, John used to ask me to come along to the steak house with him and the other guys, but like I said, they weren't paying too much money, so I wouldn't go. He offered to pay my way, but I wouldn't do that unless I could reciprocate. After I got enough extra money from freelancing and working nights, I went out with him once or twice a week. That was how I got so fat! I was thin when I first started working here. But John liked good eating. That's why one of the guys — it may have been **Everett** — drew this cartoon of me, "If this eating goes on!" showing me with this big belly.

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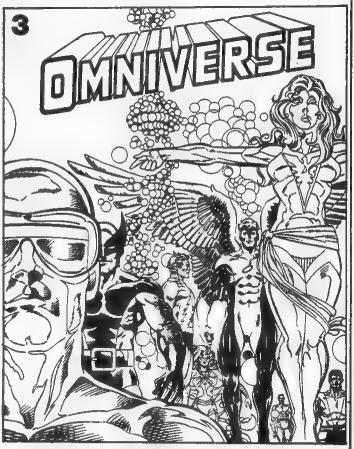

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"The majority of people in comics are nice."

Z: *Who took over Production after John?*

DANNY: Lenny Grow, and after Lenny left I moved into his position.

Z: *Comics seems to be a young person's business today. Was it like that back in the Fifties?*

DANNY: No, it was mostly older guys. When I say "older," I must have been in my twenties, and the others were in their twenties or thirties. The oldest guy was **Chris Rule** who did PATSY WALKER — he had maybe twenty years on all of us, which was the biggest age difference in the **Bullpen.** It was like there was all of us on one side and him over there. Now the **Bullpen** is more mixed up in age, but outside of myself and Morrie and **Jack Abel** most of the guys are younger.

Z: *How has the structure of the company changed?*

DANNY: Well, at one time, there was one editor, and he would read *every* book. Now they have an editor for every five books. Where once you had to satisfy only one person, now you have to satisfy five or six people.

Another thing is that the pay is better. At one time we were getting two dollars per page for lettering and now it's up to sixteen dollars per page. A pencil-and-ink job used to be twenty-five dollars per page, now it's a hundred dollars per page just for the pencils. And the good part is that the artist gets his stuff back and he's allowed to sell it to whoever the heck he wants. And they also get royalties.

Z: *So, it's improved for the creators.*

DANNY: It's better for them, in that way. But I think the best way to *do* things is the way we did years ago.

Z: *What do you mean?*

DANNY: Years ago, everything was done according to **Hoyle.** We used to get the art with the script pencilled in, rough, by the artist. Stan had an assistant who would get the pages from the artist and proofread the script, so that when we got the art it was already proofed and we wouldn't have to refer to the script at all. You could throw the script away. You could make your lettering take as much space as the pencilled-in script, and center it too, because just looking at the art you'd know where you'd end up. It was easier for the letterer. It takes time to keep referring to a script, which is what we have to do nowadays. The script is on a separate sheet of paper, supposedly proofread.

Z: *Does the writer sketch in balloon placement on the art?*

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Danny appeared in this PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ad for Marvel Comics.

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DANNY: Sometimes you don't even get that. You see, in my opinion, what's done now is more like second-guessing. And some of these writers just write and write —

Z: *They want to put WAR AND PEACE into a comic book?*

DANNY: Yes, and then they ask for changes! In the old days, when we got the art already proofed, that was it. Maybe they might want to change a balloon, on occasion. Now they change panels!

Z: *You don't get the finished, inked artwork, then?*

DANNY: We get a full-sized Xerox of the pencils and the letterer puts the lettering on a piece of vellum that's supposed to fit on the finished art. When the inking is done, the lettering is pasted on the finished art. They feel they save time that way. I don't see where they save that much time. As soon as we get back on schedule, we want to get back to the old way of doing things.

Z: *You probably had less worries and responsibilities in the old days.*

DANNY: Yeah, where once I just had to worry about giving out the lettering assignments, now I have to run around all over the place. It used to be a pleasure to be behind the drawing board lettering, or designing the logos — now I spend most of the time in the stat room, or the typesetting room. But even though you get aggravations, if you come in here and do your work nobody bothers you. It was a fun place to work in the old days and it's a fun place to work now.

"We wanted to set up an equitable company

Photo Jim Salicrup

Wearing black-and-gold Eclipse baseball jackets, Jan and Dean Mullaney met with Jim Salicrup and myself at a Manhattan restaurant to discuss their embryonic comic empire, which now includes such diverse titles as the post-apocalyptic SABRE, the hard-boiled MS. TREE, and the savagely satirical DESTROYER DUCK. Jim and I learned something about the brothers Mullaney right away, when the two lean-and-hungry-looking siblings from Staten Island, with their usual energetic intensity, scanned the menu of Middle Eastern food relentlessly, in search of meatless dishes . . .

DAK: *You're both vegetarians?*

DEAN MULLANEY: Yeah. We're going to publish NO MEAT COMICS. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Dean, I remember you used to write quite a few letters to Marvel, and you're obviously still a comics fan —but now that you've taken this giant leap and you're chief high editor of Eclipse, how has your head changed?*

JAN MULLANEY: His feet are wet.

DEAN: I found out it's a lot easier to read comics than to put them together. But it's a lot more fun putting comics together than even reading them.

DAK: *How do you pick books for Eclipse to publish?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jan Mullaney
Occupation: Publisher of Eclipse and recording artist. Basically, it's comics by day, music by night.
Born: 27 April 1953, Staten Island
Residence: Manhattan and Staten Island.
Instruments: Anything that has keys on it — except a typewriter.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dean Mullaney
Occupation: Eclipse Comics editor
Born: 18 June 1954, Staten Island, NY
Residence: Guerneville, California
Favorite writer: Raymond Chandler
Favorite singer: Mel Torme
Hobby: Relaxing and enjoying my own space.

in which everybody was comfortable."

JAN & DEAN MULLANEY

DEAN: The first criterion is if they're good. Also, that a book doesn't duplicate something we already have — one of our major goals is to keep a variety to the Eclipse line and have each book separate and distinct from the others. For example, RAGAMUFFINS is something that both Jan and I think is great, and it's a type of strip no one else has published or probably will publish. But we went ahead with it, and it's gotten really good response. And DNAGENTS is a good book, a superhero book, something we hadn't done before. There are commercial considerations, too, obviously, because you can't lose money.

DAK: *Have you lost money on anything?*

DEAN: Ask the businessman here. *(Laughter.)*

JAN: We haven't lost money on any book we've put out. We structured the company to keep the overhead low, and keep the control between the two of us. That allows us to sell a title like MS. TREE. We can afford to publish MS. TREE, but most others — Marvel, DC, probably even First, maybe Pacific — couldn't afford to publish it, because with the amount of copies we're selling, they wouldn't even see a profit. We make a very minimal amount of money on it, but we feel it's an important title because it's different, it's the kind of title no one else is doing. Not that they wouldn't want to do it, but they wouldn't be able to, financially.

DAK: *I remember being surprised quite a few years ago when Ivan Snyder—who was then, I think, Vice-President of Marvel — told us during a meeting what a couple of the books were actually making. Some low-selling Marvel books were only making a few thousand dollars. Up to that point, I always had the image that comics publishers must really be raking it in.*

DEAN: When you're publishing a whole line of books, a couple of thousand on each book is doing okay!

JAN: As long as you're making some kind of profit, and you enjoy doing a book, then it's okay. If you don't enjoy doing the book and the profit is minimal, then you have to re-think what you're doing. We don't do the books unless we really enjoy them.

JIM SALICRUP: *Well, let's go back to the beginning — how did the whole progression from fans to publishers come about?*

DEAN: It began in 1977. The writers whose work I liked the most were **Don McGregor, Steve Gerber, Steve Englehart,** and **Doug Moench** — and they were either not happy with their current situations in comics, or just not doing comics at all. I approached them so that I could do a book with each of them, so that I could have something that I would enjoy reading. I was over at Don's apartment

"It's funny that the first two books in

one night, and I saw some sketches of SABRE that **Paul Gulacy** had done. I asked Don about it, and he said it was a strip that he was going to do — for you, wasn't it, Jimmy?

JIM: *There was a period where DAK and I were running a studio, Mad Genius Associates — way back when Steve Gerber was renting space from us — and Dave published DRAGONFLAME. We just wanted, more than anything else, to see Don keep working, and so I helped him develop the character, which gave him something that he could show around to people. Eventually, it got to you.*

DEAN: Yeah, and I spoke to Jan about it. I thought, naively, that we could put a comic together for two thousand dollars. *(Laughter.)* Jan said, "Sure, I'll give you the money." We've learned a lot. Dave here helped us with the printing on SABRE, so in a way you guys helped give Eclipse a start. SABRE was the first graphic novel ever done for the direct sales market.

JAN: When Dean first approached me, I said, "How much is it going to cost?" He said, "About two thousand dollars, but there's no way you're gonna lose money. We can at least break even, and we'll be able to get something going." So we proceeded, based on that philosophy. We started sending letters to distributors — and at that time there were maybe a handful of distributors, not as many as there are now – and we got no encouragement. In effect, they were saying, "You guys are crazy. You're not gonna sell a six-dollar black-and-white comic-book, no matter what kind of paper, no matter what kind of size — it's just not gonna go." So I said to Dean, "What's going on here? I thought we weren't going to lose money?" He said, "Look, I know it's gonna go — we just gotta keep pluggin' away at it." So we proceeded, and it ended up selling over 8,000 copies!

JIM: *What were you doing at the time, Dean?*

DEAN: I was working as an accountant on Wall Street. *(Laughter.)* It was an extremely well-paying job — but enough to drive anyone to suicide. They kept offering me more and more money. I couldn't spend as much money as they'd pay me. But, you know, you gotta be happy.

JIM: *And Jan?*

JAN: I was basically doing music. I had a record out with **Frank Carillo** and I was on the road for two years touring with bands like J. GEILS.

JIM: *What was the original conception of the company? Did you think you'd just publish graphic novels?*

DEAN: We weren't sure at first. There were a number of basic intentions we had when we started. One was to see more work from the talents we enjoyed. The other was to create an atmosphere which would be more comfortable for the creative people involved — mainly, we allowed them to keep the copyright on their material, from the very first project we did. Also, we instituted a royalty program — and this was in 1977 — so that in addition to the page rate, or the "advance" as it is now called, both **Don McGregor** and **Paul Gulacy** saw money — and they're still seeing money — on those first issues of SABRE. We wanted to set up an equitable company, one in which everybody was comfortable. I feel if people have a comfortable atmosphere, people are going to do better work.

Once we did SABRE, Don wanted to do another book, DETECTIVES, INC. which **Marshall Rogers** illustrated. Marshall had just finished working on BATMAN and we hit him at just the right time. Then I called **Steve Gerber** about doing a project and it just so happens he had parted company with Marvel about a week-and-a-half before. I didn't know that at the time. So he said, "I've got a character — STEWART THE RAT." And Eclipse went on from there. We'd decided even before SABRE that Eclipse wasn't going to be a one-shot company.

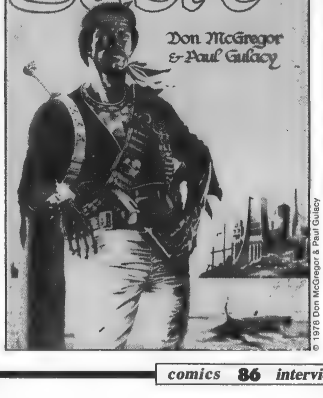
When we started we were, as you can imagine, under-capitalized. It's a family business — all the money was Jan's. When we finished SABRE, we did three other books from the profit we made on it. When those were finished, we used that profit to launch the black-and-white ECLIPSE Magazine, which started in May 1981. Then the profit from the magazine we used to start the color comics, one color comic profit helped to start another one.

DAK: *What are some of the pitfalls of comics publishing that you have discovered since then?*

DEAN: Getting the books out on time!

JAN: And getting the creative people to turn work in on time! More of them own their own copyrights. They have a lot to say in what goes on, which means there's

The SABRE graphic novel — the first Eclipse publication.



Marvel's Epic line were books we started."

a lot more responsibility on their end. It's one thing to work for a company and to be told what to do, because when you don't own the character you take a different attitude. Now that artists and writers own the copyright, there is a greater responsibility at their end. So they're taking more care and more time to produce the books. The publisher always takes the rap for not being on schedule, because obviously it's the publisher's job to get the books out on time. But when creative people give you their word and sign contracts that say they're going to do things by a certain day — then don't — there's only so much you can do.

JIM: *Wasn't one of the major complaints of creative people at the time that they were trapped at Marvel, and it was an assembly line process? They rebelled against working on schedule. I mean, most of the people you got from mainstream comics, with the exception of Doug Moench and a few others, have always had problems meeting deadlines.*

DEAN: Well, **Don McGregor** has never missed a deadline for us. He was two months late with the first SABRE graphic album, but since then everything has been on time or ahead. Don's ahead on every book. **Steve Gerber** still has some deadline problems.

JIM: *Why is it so important that they get the work in on time, anyway? How does it affect you when people are late?*

JAN: It's a domino effect. If the book is late, there are a lot of things that get affected by it. Not only is the ordering system affected, but so is the production system. We've told the separators and the printers the amount of work they can expect every month. A production schedule has been set up, so every title that gets delayed can cause total chaos in that system.

JIM: *Why are these creative people late? Is it because they're just irresponsible?*

JAN: I think I have a unique perspective on that, dealing in music and in comics. There are a lot of similarities. You're dealing with an artistic field in both music and comic books. The kind of people who draw comics and write music are basically of the same artistic temperament. Some creative people naturally take longer — other artists can work fast and get it in one "take." You can't force quality.

DAK: *Does it bother you that two people who worked for you — Steve Englehart and Jim Starlin — have now taken their creations over to Marvel's Epic line?*

DEAN: No. When we first did the graphic novel, **THE PRICE** — which is kind of a "prologue" to the DREADSTAR storyline — our agreement with Jim was that we had the first option to do another edition. We decided to pass on it. He told us Marvel was interested, and we said, "Fine, go ahead." But we retained a percentage, as originally agreed, as far as getting some of the reprint money.

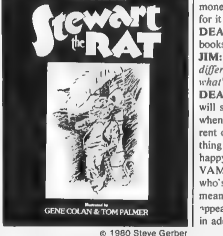
DAK: *So if you publish something and it doesn't necessarily do well for you, if it does well later for someone else, at least you get a little bit back from it.*

JAN: Oh, sure.

DEAN: Plus, we're nice guys. We don't want to tie anybody down. Since Epic was doing DREADSTAR, it made sense for them to have THE PRICE, as well.

JAN: With **Steve Englehart** we had a similar agreement. When Epic made the offer to Steve on COYOTE, we decided not to exercise our option, so Steve was free to go to Epic with it.

COYOTE, by Englehart and Rogers. From ECLIPSE #4.



DEAN: It's kind of funny that the first two books in Marvel's Epic line were books that we started! But that's what Eclipse is all about. We don't want to shackle people, lock them in the basement and tell them, "You must work only for Eclipse!" We don't have that kind of an agreement with our people, and we never will. There are writers and artists who choose to work with us exclusively, but it's not on paper.

JAN: We're not happy working anybody who's not happy working with us. I know when I do music projects, I can't work with someone if I don't enjoy working with them. 'Cause I've done that in the past, getting paid really good money, but it was hell the whole time. And once the money's gone, you have nothing to show for it — just lost time.

DEAN: We've gotta enjoy working on books. It's not just a business to us.

JIM: *How about going down the list of different Eclipse projects and telling us what's going on with them?*

DEAN: First, there's SABRE. **Jose Ortiz** will start pencilling and inking the strip when the new storyline begins. The current one — "An Exploitation of Everything Dear" — ends with issue #9. We're happy about **Ortiz.** We liked his work on VAMPIRELLA, and he's also an artist who's very popular in Europe — which means that SABRE will probably be appearing in five or six countries in Europe, in addition to the United States.

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"Publishing's not just a business to us."

DAK: *What happened to Billy Graham?*

DEAN: We all liked Bill's stuff, but we needed a more illustrative look to the art, and **Ortiz** can give us that. We'll also have **SABRE** back-ups. **Kent Williams** is drawing two, **Mike Hernandez** is drawing three. Don has spoken to a few other artists. It'll be "The World of Sabre," as Don likes to call it.

DAK: *There's also going to be a mini-series, right?*

DEAN: Yeah, we're in the talking stages of having a mini-series starring Blackstar Blood, the mercenary character. It's just a matter of finding the right artist.

JAN: The Europeans are very enthusiastic about the Sabre character. If we wanted to make a European title out of it, we could.

DAK: *Is SABRE the best-selling title of your line?*

JAN: It's up there. It's a consistent seller. Even with all the scheduling problems we had in the beginning, with certain people not turning the work in on time, we've hardly lost any sales — which, to us, really proves the strength of the character.

JIM: *I heard from Don that you had some problems with SABRE in the transition from the graphic novel to a color comic, with people complaining about the sexual elements in the comic.*

DEAN: There wasn't that much complaining. We have not received a single letter from any reader, no matter what age, complaining about the sexual aspect of the storyline. We did get some feedback from one distributor, and maybe four or five retailers, who were in counties in which it's illegal to even sell PLAYBOY. If there's anything of that nature in our books, rather than censoring it, we tell the distributors, when we send them the order forms, that this issue or title will have some partial nudity, graphic violence, or whatever the case may be. We don't want to surprise anyone, we want to work with them. But SABRE got a lot of interesting reactions. About 95% positive.

JIM: *So it didn't have any effect on sales?*

JAN: Not at all.

JIM: *You also did a Craig Russell book, didn't you?*

DEAN: Yeah. Back when it looked like both DETECTIVES, INC. and STEWART THE RAT were going to take a while in production, I called Craig, and he had a project that turned out to be NIGHT MUSIC. I think Craig's one of the best artists in the business, but he takes a while to draw things. He told me, "It'll take me nine months to draw this," and he turned it in *exactly* nine months later.

JIM: *Are there any plans to reprint that in color?*

DEAN: Starting in March, we'll be reprinting the best of STAR*REACH — STAR*REACH CLASSICS. Following that, in August or September, we're going to do a two-issue series, NIGHT MUSIC I and NIGHT MUSIC II. We'll be reprinting the graphic album in color, and Craig is doing two new stories and coloring those, as well.

JIM: *What about STEWART THE RAT? Any plans to reprint it in color?*

DEAN: Not now. There was an illegal publication of it in Sweden, which our lawyers are checking out.

WAITRESS: Anybody want anything else?

DAK: *More coffee.*

JIM: *Tab.*

DAK: *So the original STEWART and NIGHT MUSIC graphic novels did well?*

DEAN: Yes. Those books were done with perfect timing. I really think our beginning the graphic-album format to the direct-sales market had a big influence on what has happened in comics the past few years.

DNAGENTS — one of Eclipse's most popular titles.

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"The colorists are really under-rated."

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From cover of ZOT! #1. "Like our other titles, ZOT! is a different kind of book." Art by Scott McCloud.

DAK: *For a successful company you've printed very off-the-beaten-track type books. For instance, DETECTIVES, INC., is not a group of super-heroes.*

DEAN: Neither is MS. TREE. Not every book is going to be a best-seller. There are certain kinds of books which *will* be. The team super-hero groups are, obviously, doing well. We know MS. TREE, for example, is not going to sell as well as DNAGENTS or THE X-MEN or TEEN TITANS. You can't expect it to.

JIM: *Why not?*

DEAN: The largest segment of the direct-sales buying public, maybe because they were weaned on super-heroes, buys mostly super-hero titles.

JIM: *Do you think the people in the direct-sales market are different from you — less sophisticated?*

DEAN: Well, *I* like the DNAGENTS, too!

JIM: *But why don't the majority of fans like both?*

JAN: I think it's like in music. You have your top artists — you've got **Michael Jackson, Paul McCartney, The Police** — making the top records, selling millions of copies. Then you have your medium-range sellers — bands that sell only 200,000 or 300,00 copies of each album. And then you have your jazz records that might only sell 100,000 copies. Who's to say that a **Chick Corea** jazz album is any better or worse than a **Police** album? It's a matter of taste. There's a mass market mentality —

JIM: *I never bought that argument. It's strange to hear the term "mass market" applied to direct sales, which came into existence as an alternative to the mass market.*

JAN: But still, in comics, there's always a specialty-within-a-specialty. The main thing "direct sales" means is "no returns."

DAK: *Although I noticed a letter in the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE recently demanding returns. I think it's interesting that they want 60% discount, which you give for no returns, but they want returns, too.* (Laughter.)

DEAN: That's called having your cake and eating it, too.

DAK: *What if you have a title that you know is going to sell well, but the orders from the distributors are not what they should be?*

DEAN: In other words, Dave wants to know how he can sell more issues of COMICS INTERVIEW. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *A case in point: I knew issue #6 was going to sell well, and I made a point of asking for higher orders. Some distributors had enough confidence in me to increase their orders, but many didn't — and sure enough within a week, several entire areas such as New York City sold out of #6 completely! I knew it would sell — but how do you convince the distributors?*

JAN: It's very difficult. The best way to push the distributors on a title is by giving them as much advance word as possible, as much advance art work as possible, as much promotional material as possible. For example, with AZTEC ACE, we have close to 40,000 mini-posters in all the stores.

DEAN: We've been giving free hand-outs to the retailers. And the retailers are going to up their orders if they see the book is good.

JAN: We feel very strongly about AZTEC ACE, so we let them know way in advance. They order two or three months in advance. So you've got to start two or three months before *that* getting information to them, telling them what to expect, when it's going to come out, what kind of promotion we're all going to be doing. We used to run ads when the books came out. With AZTEC ACE, what we're doing is running ads as the solicitations are being sent out. 'Cause that way, while they're soliciting their orders, they're seeing advertisements.

DAK: *Yes, I noticed all those AZTEC ACE ads in BUYER'S GUIDE.*

DEAN: Doug wrote all 52 of them! *(Laughter.)*

JAN: We're finding it makes a difference. You have to sell the product to the distributors and retailers. There's a certain amount of speculation at their end. Like with DNAGENTS, we had a little bit of resistance when we first announced it, 'cause nobody really knew who **Will Meugniot** was. People knew who **Mark Evanier** was, but they weren't sure about DNAGENTS. But when we sent out the promotional material, the orders came up to what we had expected. It's definitely not an easy task. You also have to be on the phone with the distributors, letting them know as much as possible to make their job easy.

DAK: *How do you find time to do all that and also have a music career?*

JAN: I get up early and go to sleep late. *(Laughter.)*

© 1987 Silver Lantern

"Writing can be more important than art."

JIM: *How's MS. TREE doing?*

JAN: It sells in the low 30,000s.

DEAN: It's no secret — it's our lowest selling book. MS. TREE began in ECLIPSE Magazine #1. It was the first of the new detective titles to appear. And since **Terry Beatty's** art is not the traditional super-hero style, and since Ms. Tree doesn't have leotards or a secret identity, we knew we had a lot of work to do to make it a success.

JIM: *You think that's what's holding it back — the fact that the art and storyline aren't in the super-hero mold?*

JAN: Yeah, even though everyone who sits down and reads that book really walks away liking it, especially the way it's written.

DAK: *It had that effect on me!*

JAN: When I first looked at it, I thought, "The art is pretty simple, but let me sit down and read it." And when I read it, I really got absorbed, 'cause **Max Collins** is an excellent writer. Comics is basically a visual medium, but what should happen — and what I think hopefully will happen — is more of the readership will see that the writing can be equally as important, or in some cases *more* important, than the artwork.

JIM: *You mentioned SABRE, where you're trying different artwork to improve your sales in the European market. With MS. TREE, do you feel that you're happy with the way the art is now?*

DEAN: Yes. Max and Terry live close by in the same Midwest town and they work really well together. I think Terry's art is perfect for that kind of story. **Gary Kato** is working with Terry as an in-betweener. Terry's doing breakdowns. **Kato's** pencilling, and Terry's inking. Terry is also pencilling and inking all the close-ups and faces. It's given more movement to Terry's art. It's helped his art, and I think he thinks so, too.

JAN: Getting back to music, I know, when I have to work on a project, I have to relate well to the person I'm working with. If I have a really good relationship with them, that's as important — if not more important — to the end product, than anything else. Terry and Max are close friends.

DEAN: They've been working on the project together for a long time, since the end of 1980. I think as it stands now MS. TREE is one of the best comics being published by anybody. As a reader, I personally get more involved with that than most of the other comics. It gives more story, per issue. And that makes a good mystery. We've been getting a good response from the mystery audience, including a lot of women readers. We get more mail from women readers on MS. TREE than any other book. A lot of women who don't ordinarily read comics read MS. TREE.

"A lot of women who don't ordinarily read comics read MS.TREE." Above and below: Scenes from MS. TREE #5, by Beatty and Collins.

JIM: *How did that happen?*

DEAN: They're girlfriends of male comic-book fans, wives of fans, and just friends of fans.

JAN: At the San Diego Convention this year, Pacific Comics gave a party, and when **Steve Schanes** introduced his wife, he said, "These are the guys who publish MS. TREE." He said, "She doesn't read any of *my* books, but she likes MS. TREE." *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Marvel used to call SGT. FURY, "The war comic for people who hate war comics." Could you say that MS. TREE is "The comic for guys-who-like-comics' girlfriends"?*

DEAN: *You* could say that. I won't. *(Laughter.)*

JAN: I think it's different. It has a different

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look, a different approach. It's written by a person who has established himself not in the comics medium, but in the mystery medium.

DEAN: It's a throwback to when comics were told in a very straightforward style. And Max and Terry make no bones about that. It's a very conscious attempt. Both of them admire **Johnny Craig** a lot.

DAK: *You know, there was a time when such a comic wouldn't have been so unusual. Years ago, there was a much wider variety. Do you think the popularity of super-heroes will ever wane and give way to other categories as once happened?*

DEAN: I think the super-hero will continue to retain a large share of the market. But now there's also room for MS. TREE and SOMERSET HOLMES and, hopefully, MARS and JON SABLE. You know, books that aren't traditional super-hero stuff.

DAK: *Do the major comics publishers ever talk to you?*

DEAN: We get along well with them, as of now. I think we've had a big influence on them, and I don't think there would be as many creator-owned books as there are now if we hadn't started it in 1977.

DAK: *Do you get much feedback from the other alternative publishers, such as Pacific or First?*

JAN: We're actually closer to Pacific and First than we are to Marvel and DC, because we're basically doing the same kind of thing within the industry, even though we publish different kinds of books. It's beneficial to us *all* to help each other as much as possible.

DAK: *So you have a co-operative, rather than a competitive, relationship?*

JAN: I call it "friendly competition." It is competition, because there are projects that we're all gonna want and only one of us is gonna get — but, at the same time, we realize that there's enough room for us all, and that as a force we're gonna work better together than fragmented and against each other. Each of us, individually, is not as big as Marvel or DC — but if you put First, Pacific and Eclipse together, we're probably publishing as many titles as DC, or close to it. That's why I think cooperation is to our benefit.

JIM: *Jan, you were talking about rock music. There were phases when people were saying, "Rock is dead," when disco was very big — then disco waned, and you had punk and New Wave. Then people were saying the whole industry would have collapsed but for MTV and music-video — is there a parallel to comics publishing?*

JAN: A lot of it's just talk. Records have always sold. What happened was that back in the mid-Seventies — and this is what happened in comics in the last year or two, with the boom in direct sales — people were ordering and buying *anything* that was put out. If a band had a hit record, their next record was guaranteed to sell well, regardless. In the beginning of direct sales, the same thing was true. What's happened in the past several months is that people are cutting their orders back 'cause there's a lot more product on the market, and people are becoming a little more particular about what they buy. Same thing happened with records. Hit bands came out with records that flopped. And most of the time it was because the records were terrible, or they weren't as good as they should have been.

JIM: *But do you think that the direct-sales market is sophisticated enough to say, "I don't care if it's a detective or western — this is a good book"?*

JAN: To a certain degree, yes. Direct-sales is still a new field, when you think about it — a very new market for comics. It's been developing more and more rapidly over the last year or two. And I think everybody's learned daily, almost, what the limitations of the market are and what the market is all about.

JIM: *In music, people go after a particular artist. Do you think that's now happening in comics?*

DEAN: Oh, it's been happening for a long time. Comics fans follow specific writers and artists. One thing we're trying to do, aside from working with good writers and artists, is also trying to build characters, which is something that's been lacking in recent years. You know very few major characters have been developed in the last ten years that have been *really* big.

JAN: We're trying to develop a whole line of characters that we can branch out of comics. By the time this interview is in print, we'll have signed with Winterland Productions — the largest rock'n'roll T-shirt company in the country — and they're going to be handling all the T-shirts and merchandising for us. Merchandising is the whole key to making a mark in this business.

JIM: *Will you include subscription coupons on the T-shirts?* (Laughter.)

JAN: Marvel has basically had its biggest success because of all the outside merchandising of the Hulk and Spider-Man.

DAK: *There's now across-the-board recognition of those characters. Maybe you'd have to go to newsstand distribution to get that kind of recognition.*

"Every delayed title can cause chaos."

Photo: Rick Best

Dean Mullaney and Steve Gerber at the San Diego Comicon banquet, August 1982.

DEAN: I don't think half of the direct-sales books would sell enough copies on the newsstand to make it worthwhile.

DAK: *Do you think publishers who are selling direct now will ever take the books to the "national newsstands?*

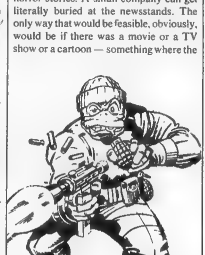
DEAN: Not us.

JAN: Maybe to 7-Ills, but not the ordinary newsstands

DAK: *DNAGENTS has been pretty popular, and might also have n. · sstand appeal to casual readers who aren't into direct-sales comics.*

DEAN: Well, I think the way to reach those people is to increase the number of comics shops, rather than go through the I-D system. The established companies have been moving *away* from the I-D system with good reason — so the key to success in reaching those people is just get more shops. And the number of shops is increasing all the time.

JAN: With newsstand distribution there are just so many things you have to deal with that hurt sales. There are so many horror stories. A small company can get literally buried at the newsstands. The only way that would be feasible, obviously, would be if there was a movie or a TV show or a cartoon — something where the character would be so popular that it would necessitate newsstand sales to get it out to a broader market – because there would be people who don't frequent the comics shops who would want to buy the comics. But that would be an isolated incident. It definitely wouldn't be the norm. One thing we're doing to get broader recognition for an Eclipse character is developing the MIKE MIST MINUTE MYSTERY series as an animated short, for cable TV



JIM: *Getting back to the Eclipse line, what's the story behind DESTROYER DUCK?*

DEAN: After we started ECLIPSE magazine in 1981, we wanted to get into color comics as well. **Steve Gerber** was having some legal problems with Marvel over HOWARD THE DUCK. So DESTROYER DUCK was something we did to help Steve raise money for his lawsuit. We contributed our time and put our money into it without getting any back. **Jack Kirby** did the art for free. That reaffirmed what Eclipse was all about.

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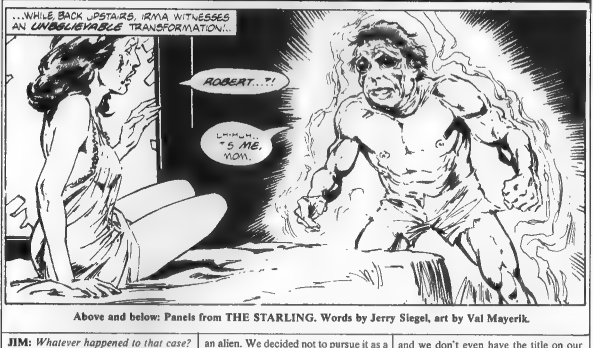

Above and below: Panels from THE STARLING. Words by Jerry Siegel, art by Val Mayerik.

JIM: *Whatever happened to that case?*

DEAN: You have to ask Steve. It was settled out of court and we're not privy to the legalities.

JIM: *What's the future for that book?*

DEAN: Well, by the time this comes out, #5 will be out, which is Steve's and Jack's last issue as a writer/artist team. Steve continues as editor, but won't be writing it any more, and Jack didn't want to continue as artist. **Buzz Dixon** — who is an animation writer, and a published mystery writer as well — is scripting #6 and #7, and the penciller is **Gary Kato**, who we mentioned before. **Alfredo Alcala** will be continuing as inker. That will take us to the end of the current contract, and we'll decide then what the future of the book will be. The back-up feature, THE STARLING, which **Jerry Siegel** created and **Val Mayerik** is drawing, will get its own title some time next year.

JIM: *How did you get in touch with Jerry Siegel? I'm interested in how the co-creator of SUPERMAN came to work for Eclipse.*

DEAN: *He* contacted *us.*

JIM: *Just think, if he worked for you in the beginning, he'd* own *SUPERMAN.*

JAN: We weren't born then! *(Laughter.)*

DEAN: Jerry contacted me in 1981, with a proposal for a three-graphic-novel series featuring the Starling, a child fathered by an alien. We decided not to pursue it as a graphic album, but to do it as a back-up in our color comics. Jerry's one of the most enthusiastic people I've ever encountered. He's written the script for the first two issues of THE STARLING's own book, and we don't even have the title on our schedule yet!

JIM: *Will Val Mayerik stay as artist?*

DEAN: Yeah, Val's gonna be pencilling, inking and doing the finished cover.

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"YOU'RE MY SON, ROBERT, BUT YOU'RE ALSO MAN--A HALF-BREED LOCATED SCHOLARMERS IN THE HEAVENS OR PERHAPS IN THE FLAMES OF HELL."

© 1983 Jerry Siegel

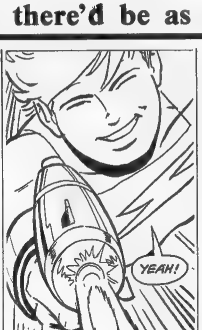
"I don't think there'd be as many creator-

JIM: *In all the books we've been talking about, there must have been times when things just didn't work out the way you'd imagined. Any examples?*

DEAN: You want us to get phone calls from disgruntled writers and artists? *(Laughter.)* I'm sure Steve will admit that the ending of STEWART THE RAT didn't come out the way either he or I would have liked. In retrospect, we would have done the ending differently. The art was great, the script was fabulous, the whole lead-up and first two-thirds of the book really were great. But it kind of fell apart towards the end. It was a minor disappointment.

JIM: *To what extent are you involved in the production of a book — that is, in things like choosing the plot, selecting the creative team, and so forth?*

DEAN: It varies from book to book. For example, on DESTROYER DUCK, Steve's the editor. It was his idea for **Jack Kirby** and **Alfredo Alcala** to work together. Steve and Jack had done work for Ruby-Spears and Steve sent me samples of the Thundarr character that Steve co-created with **Joe Ruby.** On that book, I acted more as editor-in-chief. On SABRE, I'm the editor. **Don McGregor** sends the script and I work with him very closely in every process of producing the book. On AZTEC ACE, **Cat Yronwode** does all the editorial work, and I'm the editor-in-chief. I work very closely with Max and Terry as editor-in-chief of MS. TREE. Cat and I co-edit ECLIPSE Monthly and together decide what strips are going to be in it. She edits some strips and I edit others. With DNAGENTS, **Mark Evanier** is the editor, and we discuss the plots somewhat, but mainly he comes in with the package.



© 1984 Silver Linings

JIM: *It would be nice to see Jack Kirby and Jerry Siegel working on a project together.*

DEAN: They deserve better than they've gotten from comics over the years.

JIM: *You have a bunch of new books coming out, right?*

DEAN: We're just about going to double the Eclipse line by mid-year, with AZTEC ACE in January, the STAR*REACH CLASSICS in March, and a new book called ZOT! We have a lot of hopes for that book — it's going to be monthly. Like our other titles, ZOT is a different kind of book. It's about a thirteen-year-old superhero from another dimension who's the

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owned books now if we hadn't started in 1977."

only super-hero on his Earth. It'll deal with a lot of problems a thirteen-year-old may encounter. It's got a lot of villains. It's real current, real up-to-date.

DAK: *What else is on the way?*

DEAN: **Marshall Rogers**'ll be doing CAP'N QUICK AND THE FOOZLE — oops, I mean, A FOOZLE — spinning it off from ECLIPSE Monthly.

DAK: *Yeah, I noticed the billing changed.*

DEAN: Originally, it was CAP'N QUICK AND THE FOOZLE, but we found out it's only *a* Foozle. There are others.

DAK: *The Foozle Union complained?* (Laughter.)

DEAN: We got a couple of letters of complaint from the National Association for the Advancement of Foozles.

DAK: *Was that the most popular strip in ECLIPSE Monthly?*

DEAN: It's the one we got the most positive feedback on. One of the things I've got ECLIPSE Monthly for is to try out new strips. We see what the response is, and if we feel we can do a whole book, we spin one off. For example, the response to **Doug Wildey's** RIO is phenomenal, but unfortunately for us Doug is one of the highest-paid animation directors in Hollywood, so he is not going to do comics full time. I would love to do a RIO book with him. And the response to THE MASKED MAN has been really good. We're going to keep that in ECLIPSE Monthly for a while, and if the response continues to be good that, too, may get a series. We've got a series coming up — THE NEW CALIFORNIAN, by **Christy Marx** and **Peter Ledger.** It'll run three issues and if the response is positive, it'll get its own book.

JIM: *Will there be more issues of SCORPIO ROSE?*

DEAN: There will be a third issue. Marshall's breaking it down. **Michael Hernandez,** who did the first AZTEC ACE, is pencilling it. And **Frank Lauria** will be writing the script over **Steve Engelhart's** original plot. That will end the three-issue series of SCORPIO ROSE.

JIM: *Have you been able to accomplish everything you wanted?*

DEAN: I think that we've got a really varied line, and that's my main interest —

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"One of our major goals is to keep

to have a whole line of books, each one different from the other. I thought we had all the books we needed, but then, all of a sudden, I got the proposal for ZOT! I'd like to do a western, but I don't know if the market's ready for it yet, although the response has been good to RIO in ECLIPSE Monthly. The distributors'll tell me, "RIO's great! I really loved it!" Then I'll ask them, "Well, what about monthly RIO comics?" and they'll tell me, "Oh, no — westerns don't sell!" *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *But if you'd listened to them you wouldn't have done the first graphic novel to begin with —*

DEAN: It's a tough attitude to break. I'd also like to do a romance book — but so, it seems, does everybody else.

DAK: *Yeah, people have been beating the drums for a romance book for a couple of years now. I keep expecting a flurry of them.*

DEAN: Well, we don't have any plans for one right now.

JIM: *Who negotiates the hiring of letterers, colorists and inkers? Is it you, or the creators?*

DEAN: The contracts read that it's by mutual agreement. We can't say to a penciller, "You have to have this inker" — or this letterer or that colorist. And they can't tell us that they want a certain letterer or colorist we don't like. It has to be a mutual agreement.

JIM: *What if one of your people said, "I want to ink my own stuff"?*

DEAN: If they're a good inker, I'll say, "Yes." We pride ourselves on being reasonable — getting along with people. If the penciller isn't a good inker, I'll tell him. For example, it took **Marshall Rogers**' a long time to learn how to ink. I think the first job he inked was DETECTIVES, INC. I think Marshall is one of the best inkers in the business.

JAN: Marshall is also coloring and lettering his own stuff now. He takes a different approach to the pencils, and to the inks, when he knows how he's going to color it. It gives him a different perspective.

B. C. Boyer's THE MASKED MAN.

© 1983 B. C. Boyer

DEAN: I think the colorists are really under-rated in comic books, and a lot of bad coloring has been done in comics and is *still* being done in comics. That's going to be the next push upwards.

DAK: *When you started Eclipse and were doing that first black-and-white graphic album, did you ever think you'd be doing a whole color-comics line someday?*

DEAN: No. And even today, if we had to use the toilet paper they print most comics on, we wouldn't be printing four-color comics. We've done three issues of SABRE, and three of MS. TREE, in color, and only two were on that bad newsprint. The rest were on Mando. We switched to Baxter for all of our books as soon as we could.

JIM: *Why?*

DEAN: Because I think that's the best package. One of our intentions that we started off with was to try to elevate the package that comics were presented in. That's why we chose to start with the graphic-album format which has been popular in Europe for so long.

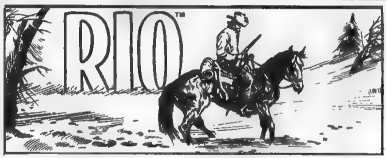
JIM: *Why do you think Baxter makes the best package?*

DEAN: It'll last. It holds the colors well.

JIM: *Some people feel that it's almost too bright.*

DEAN: I think that all depends upon the colorist. It's been difficult for some colorists to make the transition from coloring for newsprint — in which the

a variety to the Eclipse line."



© 1983 Doug Wildey

yellowish paper absorbs all the ink — to coloring for Baxter, in which the color sits on top of the paper.

DAK: *Do you see Eclipse continuing to grow?*

DEAN: Oh, yeah. As I said, we'll double the output by the middle of the year and that'll give us nine or ten titles.

DAK: *Which makes you as big as Marvel when it really took off in the early Sixties.*

DEAN: Exactly. With a staff about as small as they had then, too. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *What are you going to do when Eclipse gets too big?*

DEAN: It'll never get too big.

JAN: We don't want it ever to get so big that he can't overlook the projects and I can't make the deals.

DEAN: Nothing's going to come out that we can't oversee or at least look at. 'Cause then there's a danger of things happening that you don't want.

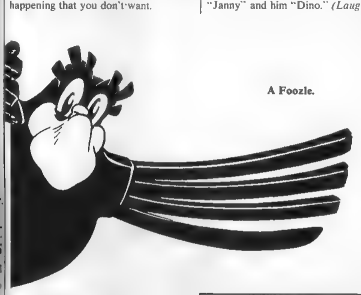
JIM: *At least one of those things has already happened. One Eclipse book I looked at had two identical versions of the same ad facing each other, one in color and one in black-and-white.*

DEAN: That wasn't a mistake. That was a test for any aspiring colorist! *(Laughter.)* Actually that was my fault. The covers are printed separately from the interiors. I didn't remember that an identical ad was on the last page.

JIM: *If you ever have a spare page and need an ad, I'm sure we could contribute one for COMICS INTERVIEW!* (Laughter.)

DAK: *One final question, something I'm sure many people wonder — did your parents deliberately name you Jan and Dean, after the singers?*

JAN: No, it had nothing to do with them. We were born before they became famous. The reason we were called Jan and Dean was that my mother was totally against nicknames. She hated nicknames of kids. However, as it turned out, they called me "Janny" and him "Dino." *(Laughter.)*



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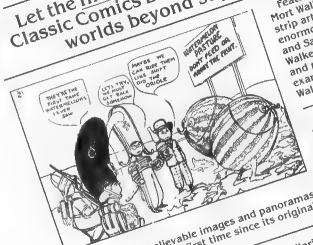
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WARREN REECE

In Part One, Warren Reece talked about his vast collection and the genesis of organized fandom . . . Marvel's "creative zenith" . . . fandom and collecting in England . . . his appearance with Stan Lee on Tom Snyder's TOMORROW show . . . behind-the-scenes intrigue at Marvel . . . and fond memories of SUB-MARINER's creator, Bill Everett.

Here in Part Two, Warren discusses nefarious dealers . . . "the HOWARD THE DUCK caper" . . . his formula for a fair price . . . and a certain well-known skyscraper-climbing anthropoid . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *You once noted the influence of the film KING KONG on those early SUB-MARINERs. Can you tell me about that?*

WARREN: Yeah, sure. Well, first of all, the wrecking spree that Namor had in New York paralleled KING KONG a great deal. And the battle between Namor and the animals at the Bronx Zoo paralleled Kong's with dinosaurs. The fascination that Namor had for Lynn Harris in MARVEL MYSTERY # 11, 12 and some other early issues remind one of Kong's fascination with Anne Darrow. Lynn was a blonde, just like Anne Darrow, and along with her boyfriend, Luther Robinson, and a crew of toughs goes on a ship — just like Carl Denham went to Skull Island. They go down to the South Pole to bring back the Sub-Mariner or to kill him after this wrecking spree he's had in New York. Even the fact that Namor was temporarily captured in MARVEL MYSTERY # 6 — he was sentenced to death in the Electric Chair — and he breaks free from captivity even as Kong breaks free from his captivity, reminds one of KING KONG.

I'm not saying that **Bill Everett** consciously plagiarized. We're all, I think, the sum total of our influences. He was inspired by many things.

JIM: *Well, getting back to collecting, what are the comics that you're still after?*

WARREN: Oh, I wouldn't want to single them out. I might get the prices jacked up on them. *(Laughter.)* There aren't really that many.

JIM: *Well, how many do you need?*

WARREN: Oh, there must be hundreds or maybe over a thousand books that I don't have.

JIM: *From what period?*

WARREN: I'm talking about really offbeat books from the Forties and Fifties. Things that aren't really that important to me to get. I will probably never have them all because they've gotten too expensive now. It's very nice, let's say, to have a CAPTAIN AMERICA # 33, but is it worth going out and spending, let's say, $80.00 for it? The really, really important stuff, for the most part, I've got.

JIM: *How expensive is it to be a comic collector?*

WARREN: Nowadays it depends on what you want to collect.

JIM: *How about Golden Age Marvels?*

WARREN: Forget it. Unless you have

Photo of Warren and his collection, last issue, by Mary Jane Groebsch of WRFM Radio

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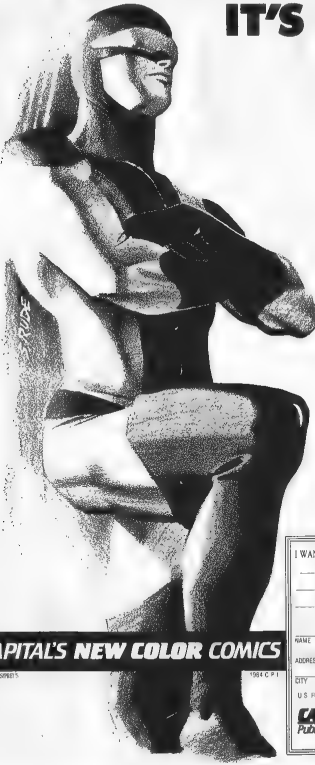

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"The market is manipulated by dealers."

God's help, which I most certainly had to have had, considering the type of budget I had, back yonder. And believe me that as a kid I used to pray to God for help on that! *(Laughter.)* Anyone starting with the money I had to work with at the time, would find it impossible. I mean, think about it. I was *very* young. I was sixteen years old when I got MARVEL COMICS #1 for $220.00. It took me many, many months of dealing and hard work and what-not — saving up my allowances — to do that. Nowadays — well, look, a copy of MARVEL #1 sold recently for, I think, $17,500.

It's very, very expensive. There are a few gems that are still very inexpensive, like the Lee-Kirby-Ditko pre-hero things from 1959 to 1962.

JIM: *So some things are still undervalued?*

WARREN: Tremendously. I mean, I cannot see a MARVEL #1 being $17,500. and a #2 being only two thousand bucks or something. Those other issues are worth much, much more. I would say that if you want to determine the value of a comic, find out what the value of a first issue is and then divide the number of the particular issue into the price of the first issue. You would get something a lot less arbitrary than this nonsense going on in the marketplace right now, which is manipulated by dealers.

JIM: *You sound rather bitter about all this.*

WARREN: I meant to be matter-of-fact rather than bitter because most of it doesn't affect me personally. Whether or not things go up or down tomorrow virtually has no effect on me because I have no intention of selling my collection.

JIM: *What do you think is behind it all?*

WARREN: The PRICE GUIDE has a lot to do with it. I don't buy it or support it because it perpetuates unrealistic proportions of values for books. The dealers have a lot to do with the insane prices, too.

JIM: *How can it be the dealers?*

WARREN: Easily. Because the dealers

Sub-Mariner escapes the Electric Chair in MARVEL MYSTERY #6. "It reminds one of KING KONG," says Warren.

HA—I FEEL BETTER THAT SHOCK WAS JUST—
—WHAT I NEEDED.
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WE'LL GET RID OF THIS FIRST, THEN—
HE—HE'S STILL ALIVE! GET HIM, MEN!
ONE SIDE, FOOLS!
THERE—IT WILL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE THEY CAN ELECTROCUTE ANYONE ELSE!
CRACK!
BANG

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AC COMICS

"The advent of direct-sales has been wonderful."

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have the supply, and the dealers go and stick values on books that do not necessarily correspond to the value you're getting for your money.

JIM: *Well, can you blame a dealer for asking any price he wants for something that's his?*

WARREN: Yes, I can. I think the dealer could make a living while charging an appropriate price for the appropriate book. I don't object to someone charging $100.00 or something for a comic. I object to some of the comics that they're charging $100.00 for, okay?

JIM: *But there must be people willing to pay that. No one's putting a gun to the buyers heads.*

WARREN: The fact that someone's willing to pay something does not always mean they're happy about it, nor that the book is really worth it.

JIM: *Well, what motivates somebody to overpay for something?*

WARREN: Most of the time people overpay for a comic because they think they're going to sell it later for more money. And that's a very erroneous way of thinking, especially on newer comics, because there are so damn many of them being bought up in quantities by speculators that there'll never be a real scarcity. In effect, a few people get a hold of the supply of something and jack the price up.

HOWARD THE DUCK #1 was the prime case in point. Whole shipments were bought up, entire New York supplies were cornered by a few people, shipments were hijacked and stolen. In effect, while the thing was brand new it was withheld from the public, and this was only because a rumor got out that it was going to be a "hot" book. In effect it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

JIM: *But, now with the direct sales, it's impossible for any one person to hoard a particular title, or first issue.*

WARREN: Oh, they're doing it. They can't withhold from the market, but they are hoarding. There's a dealer I go to in Brooklyn, who'll buy maybe a hundred copies of **Byrne's** ALPHA FLIGHT or something like that. Or there's another guy I know here in New York who was buying about 100 copies of every X-MEN. So they are hoarding.

JIM: *What happens if, as a result of this, the number of people collecting comics as years go by actually increases? Where the demand may actually outstrip the supply? It sounds like you're assuming there's always going to be a constant or steady amount of people who are interested in comics. Have you seen any evidence that there's actually an increase in collectors?*

MARVEL MYSTERY #9.

WARREN: Oh, there are a hell of a lot more collectors, today! When I started this thing, I was one of the "Filthy Few." Young folks collecting now can scarcely realize what a raunchy thing it was to do back in the 1960s. Boy, we were really at the bottom of the social ladder. The criminals, the dope-peddlers — I mean everybody — must have looked down on the bloody comic-book collectors. We were sort of pioneers back then. We were certainly not the first people to ever read comics, but we were pretty much near the ground-floor of systematic collecting. And that's certainly why the older comics are, the scarcer they tend to be, because less people were saving them. And when you get to the 1930s and '40s there are books where there are only 20 copies known, 10 copies known, or even less. It's a whole different thing now. The advent of direct-sales has been wonderful, because it makes for one-stop shopping for the collector. We used to travel for miles in order to get all the monthly releases.

JIM: *How do you buy your comics now? Do you ever get them mail-order?*

WARREN: You mean my back issues? Hardly ever.

JIM: *Why is that?*

WARREN: I like to see what I'm getting.

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COUNT ON US.

"Shipments of HOWARD THE DUCK #1 were hijacked."

Pure and simple. If you deal through the mail, you run a good chance of getting burned. You also are not in as good a position to bargain on package deals. I've done business through the mail sometimes with some very reputable people — very nice folks. But by and large, I do all my business in person.

JIM: *In comic book stores, or conventions?*

WARREN: Well, my new books I get all from the comic-book stores. And of course, since I work on and off in comics they give me a professional discount, which is nice of them. My back issues I gather from hither and yore.

JIM: *What do you think of the grading systems?*

WARREN: You mean, like condition and all that? I was never a fanatic when it came to getting my back issues in bad condition. When I was a kid, they didn't price by condition, for the most part. Nor should they. Because you're paying — especially on a hard-to-find book — for the pleasure of being able to get to that bit of lost history. A good condition comic performs the same function as a fine condition comic. It's become a synergistic effect, because people so fear problems with resale that they clamor for the best condition. And yet there are some books that are virtually unavailable in that kind of condition. I wouldn't have the set of MARVEL MYSTERY today if I waited for only fine-condition issues to turn up.

JIM: *You mentioned that Marvel has used you as a researcher. Can you tell us about that?*

WARREN: Because I have all this old stuff, whenever they don't know something at Marvel about the history of the books, and they don't have the research materials there, I get called upon to help. They may, for example, need a report on some obscure character that appeared in STRANGE TALES. Sometimes they need pictures of the old books for articles on the Bullpen Page. That MARVEL COMICS #1 that appeared on the Bullpen Page for the Fortieth Anniversary of Marvel was my copy. Last week they needed Merry Marvel Marching Society membership records, which I have. They came to know that if there's any place that they might find some obscure piece of Marvel memorabilia, it's probably "the Chamber of Fantasy," where I live.

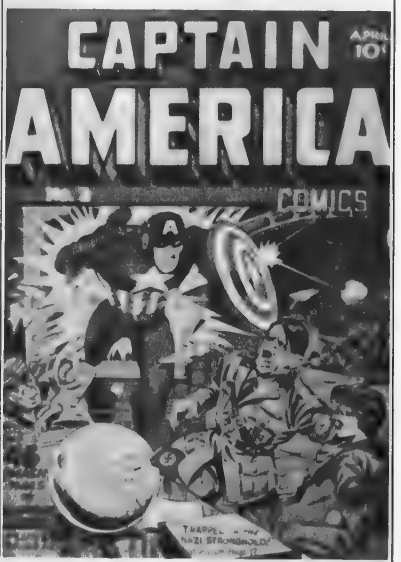
Sometimes I think of the old joke, "My job is so secret even I don't know what I'm doing." I did a series of character-profiles, which **Jim Shooter** supervised. And one day I walked into **Shooter's** office and asked him, "What do you *do* with that stuff?" He said, smiling, "You want to know what we do with your stuff?" And he chucked this thing onto my lap that was as thick as the Brooklyn telephone book. It was a collection of all these reports I'd written, alphabetized and bound. And Jim said, "You know it costs the company $35.00 every time we have to make one of these?" I was very flattered. I mean, $35.00 is more than two years salary around that place! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Any final words of advice to collectors?*

WARREN: Yes. First of all, you're entitled to the best copy of a title that the dealer has, at a fair price — but don't go spending two or three times the base price of a comic in order to get it in better condition. If you have to, take the second-best or third-best. This will remove a lot of alarm over condition in the marketplace. Because the book will move more, even in the lesser grades, and when the dealers see that they move, they will not be as reluctant to buy them.

And finally — above all — *please* don't buy comics with the idea that it's going to be an investment. They're there to be enjoyed. If you're buying them just to tie up your money, you could end up being the guy who gets stuck with them. But if you're buying comics because you really like them, you can never go wrong. Because even if you don't re-sell them, you're happy with them. And that's what really counts.

CAPTAIN AMERICA #2.



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Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

WE'RE UNIQUE

Dear DAK,

COMICS INTERVIEW is a unique and interesting magazine. The recent interview with **George Perez** was refreshing. I can understand his frustration and fandom's loss!

Best wishes in the future, as I send in this renewal check for 12 issues!

John Price
4 Cedarwood Lane
Russellville, AR 72801

D'ARC DILEMMA

Hello there, Dave —

Well, it was positively delightful to see the D'ARC TANGENT interview in print; and especially good to see the ad, which came out pretty much as striking as I'd hoped it would. There were, however, certain incidental ironies inherent in the situation . . .

Namely, that #2 *isn't* out yet, and that Phil and I are splitting up. I think the appropriate phrase is "irreconcilable creative differences." When we started out, one of our goals was to blend his fluidity with my realism. #1 didn't quite pull it off smoothly, but showed us the way. #2 was really quite satisfying . . . but was taking too long to do. So an argument developed (the essential core of which is that I worked too slow to satisfy Phil, and he worked with insufficient quality to satisfy me) and said argument finally just got so big that we could no longer work together, and have decided to go our own ways.

The only question is — what happens to D'ARC?

And the only answer is — in a few months, after the lawyers are done with it, we'll know. Right now we're investigating just what the legal necessities are: How to go about folding the company, returning subscriptions and the money from the investors, and so forth. After that, we'll begin the fight over the rights. I do believe that D'ARC will continue. But whether it will be done by Phil or by me (or by both of us independently!) and what imprint it will come out under . . . those are all mysteries which should be resolved, I hope, by the spring.

Freff
8102 23rd Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11214

THEY SHOOT SHE-HULKS, DON'T THEY?

Dear DAK,

COMICS INTERVIEW #7 was another fascinating, fast-reading issue. This magazine has definitely become my favorite comic-related zine. Your many interviews are long enough to be informative and have some depth, but short enough to be interesting all the way through. I breeze through your magazine quickly, and I've been known on occasion to read an entire issue in one sitting. This is another aspect of COMICS INTERVIEW I appreciate — I'm always left wanting more, and eagerly awaiting the next issue.

As much as I applaud your fine work on this mag, DAK, I must question the need to put the OMEGA MEN on the cover of this issue . . . I realize that you did feature an interview with the new artist for that book, and thus, the interview was justified. I just don't feel the OMEGA MEN warranted a second cover appearance so soon.

Other than this one oversight, however, the rest of the issue was fine. Except for one other thing — I agree with **Brian Talley**, who on your letters page stated that COMICS INTERVIEW should stop publishing my anti-She-Hulk tirades. I hereby promise not to write any more anti-She-Hulk letters as soon as Marvel promises not to publish any more comics

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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with She-Hulk in them! She's the worst character ever created! I hate her! I want her killed! I — oops. Sorry. Just got a little carried away there.

Damn! And I promised I wasn't gonna dump on She-Hulk this time!

Barry Dutter
2283 Old Farm Road
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

CUT THE SHE-HULK SOME SLACK

Dear DAK,

(This worked for **Sean Carr**, so I hope it'll work for me!)

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Amy Sacks
Residence: Deal Park, NJ
Born: New York City, 1966
Occupation: Student, aspiring writer/artist
Training: Mostly self-taught, but hope to do better
Loves: Intelligent letters, interesting heroines
Hates: Rampant stupidity, double standards, people who can't think of better things to do than malign fictional characters

This letter is just to let you know that at least one reader was disgusted and dismayed by **Barry Dutter**'s comments about the She-Hulk. Listen, Barry, some of us actually *like* heroines whose powers demand that they hit people to do their job instead of firing cute little force bolts at them from 500 feet away. So what if Jennifer Walters is quick-tempered and is inclined to fight first and ask questions later? Those are character flaws, and we all have them in some form or another. Obviously "women's lib" is still only an empty concept if such traits are considered acceptable, even intriguing, on a male character like Wolverine, but "butch" or "repulsive" when applied to a woman.

Sigh.

Amy Sacks
406 Crosby Ave
Deal Park, NJ 07723

IS THIS MAN A LAWYER? IF NOT — HE SHOULD BE!

Dear Mr. Kraft:

Believe it or not, I did indeed have difficulty finding funds to finance the continuance of my name on your roster of subscribers — until your recent enravishing flyer inspired me to float a loan. Thus, lest I miss an issue of your most exciting magazine, I've enclosed a check for $9, said sum to cover the renewal of my charter subscription to COMICS INTERVIEW — and hence, the purchase of issues seven through twelve, inclusive.

Having so decisively dispensed with that bit of business, I must direct your attention to the never-received third issue of your magazine — that of May 1983. That you failed to mail it to me seems highly unlikely — as you've otherwise proven quite conscientious — so I can't help but fear that our nefarious Postal Service managed to "misappropriate" the poor thing. *Whatever* the circumstances of its failure to materialize in my mailbox, I long to complete my collection by acquiring that number of your COMICS INTERVIEW; I'd thus appreciate greatly any advice you might tender anent said acquisition. Ideally, you'd mail a replacement; as I couldn't help but note, however, you began advertising the May issue as "sold out" only two months after its appearance — or, in this case, *disappearance.* So: please advise.

Anxiously,

Bryan A. Hollerbach
Route 2, Box 143
Ste. Genevieve, MO 63670

What a letter, Bryan — what a letter!

Lesley got a kick out of the feedback to her subscription renewal flyer, and I melted before such an onslaught of rhapsodic rhetoric. Mind you, the post

JIM STARLIN

STARLIN speaks about **Warlock, Captain Marvel & Dreadstar** — GERBER, AUSTIN & OLIFF on **Deaths of Superheroes** — DC's DICK GIORDANO, part 1. From FOSTER to FRAZETTA — The last ROY G. KRENKEL interview — Cover by STARLIN.

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OMEGA MEN

A talk with new artist TOD SMITH — inker MIKE DECARLO, too — a first look at **D'Arc Tangent** — TV star **ROBERT CULP** talks about comics — plenty more! **Omega Men** cover by SMITH & DECARLO!

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office eats many an issue, and each time they charge us full postage to replace a missing copy (what a racket). We are woebegone — yet we cannot deny a loyal subscriber his due.

Nay, a thousand times nay!

And so, through the magic of a recently-discovered stash at Bud Plant's warehouse, I am again sending for your literary edification a rare copy of that much-sought-after COMICS INTERVIEW #3. Enjoy it in high spirits, and pass the word about INTERVIEW, please! Thanks for being a booster, Bryan.

—DAK

WE'RE TERRIFIC

Hiya, Dave!

Jack Harris' kind words about yours truly in the letter column of COMICS INTERVIEW#8 reminded me that I'm long past writing you to express my appreciation of your magazine.

Ironically, my good friend Jack's facetious comment that you could do an entire issue filled with **Tony Isabella** interviews and the behind-the-scenes stories I could tell pinpoints one of the things I like best about CI. A while back, it was fashionable for writers and artists to martyr themselves in the fan press with the stories of the horrendous torments they had suffered while working at one company or another. I always found this public blood-letting more than a little unprofessional. Fact of life: Someone always has the upper hand, someone always has the losing hand. Real talent usually rises above this.

For the most part...you didn't think I was going to award you a perfect score, didja?...COMICS INTERVIEW has steered clear of this sort of sensationalism. Your magazine has far more lasting value as a result. It's terrific. I hope your second year is even more successful than your first.

Tony Isabella
COSMIC COMICS
22 Colonial Arcade
Cleveland, Ohio 44115

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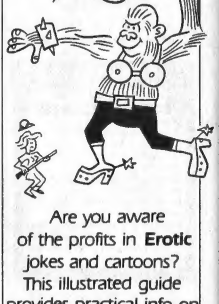

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NEXT ISSUE: At last! The man who made comics history with the classic MASTER OF KUNG FU — writer *Doug Moench* — **pulls out all the stops with a first look at his new series . . . AZTEC ACE!** *Steve Leialoha* sounds off in a wacky **interview about his early days with** *George Lucas*, Money vs. Art, and Amazing Coincidences in Comics! Lots more in COMICS INTERVIEW #10 — an ACE cover by *Mike Hernandez* and *Tom Yeates!*

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- Superboy
- Supergirl
- Superman
- Vigilante
- Warlord
- Any Limited Series
- Any One shot
- Any Annual
- Any Classic Comic
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- Blue Ribbon
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- DNAgents
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- Ms. Tree
- Sabre
- Scorpio Rose
- Any Eclipse # !

AMERICOMICS
- Americomics
- Americomics Special
- Black Diamond
- Bolt & Star Force 6
- Fun Comics
- Sentinels of Justice
- Any Americomics # !

EAGLE COMICS
- Judge Dredd (color)

FAN MAGAZINES
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